THE DEATH OF DR. WHITELAW

ALEXANDER WILSON

$2.00

THE DEATH OF DR. WHITELAW

By ALEXANDER WILSON
Author of MURDER MANSIONS
and THE DEVIL'S COCKTAIL

THE SUDDEN death of Dr. Whitelaw fell as a bomb-shell on London society. How did he die? Did he hit his head against the marble statue, or was he murdered—and by whom? By his beautiful young wife, Patricia, whom he had accused of being unfaithful to him, or by handsome young John Armitage, the son of his oldest friend, just back from a triumph in cricket at Lord's? Was John Armitage an innocent man falsely accused, or was he a double-dyed criminal, murderer, abductor, and libertine? And was Leslie, the young detective from Scotland Yard, trying to shield the guilty man, or to clear the innocent from guilt? With Leslie, the reader prowls among the wharves of Limehouse, leaps from one train to another to evade pursuit, and even holds up the Prime Minister himself. Not until the last page does the reader discover the guilty man, know the pursued from the pursuer, in this swiftly moving story by one of the masters of the modern detective story.

Martha R. Prescott

The Death of Dr. Whitelaw

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AUTHOR OF

The Mystery of Tunnel 51, The Devil's Cocktail
Murder Mansion

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WILSON

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The Characters in this Story Are Fictitious

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CHAPTER I

ARMITAGE PAYS A VISIT

Jack Armitage walked through the players' gate at Lords and, avoiding a crowd of youthful autograph hunters, sprang into a taxicab and directed the smiling driver to take him to his hotel in Northumberland Avenue.

As he was whirled along the St. John's Wood Road he leaned back in his seat and gave himself up to the contemplation of the roseate hue which had suddenly promised to spread round his future. Recently down from his varsity, where he had obtained a cricket "Blue," he had been chosen to play in a test trial match and had covered himself with glory. In addition to making a flawless century in each innings, his fielding had been the talk of the spectators and there was little doubt that he had played himself into the team that would shortly be selected to tour Australia.

By no means of a smug or self-opinionated temperament, Jack nevertheless felt very much pleased with his success in the match just concluded, when mainly through his good work the Rest had pulled off a very creditable draw with the cream of England's cricketers. Men whose names were world-famous in the realm of the great summer game had gone out of their way to congratulate him, and it was no wonder that he felt just a little bit overcome by the realization of the renown that had so suddenly chosen a resting place on his broad shoulders.

A magnificent specimen of young manhood, he was twenty-four years of age, six feet two inches in height, and as straight as

a ramrod. Not particularly handsome, he possessed a good-humoured, pleasant face, the attractiveness of which was enhanced by the deep bronze colouring which a life spent mainly in the open air had produced. His grey eyes had a peculiar habit of screwing up into mere slits when he laughed, with the result that tiny wrinkles showed at each corner. He had a large mop of unruly brown hair surmounting a broad forehead which was indicative of the brain power which he undoubtedly possessed. Altogether Jack Armitage was as clean-limbed, as typical an example of the athletic Englishman as any who had ever played cricket on that most famous of the world's great grounds.

As the taxi reached Baker Street, Jack decided to pay a short visit to some friends living close to Regent's Park. He gave instructions, therefore, and was driven to Wimpole Street where he alighted and ascended the steps of a house that seemed by its very austerity to denote the residence of a great medical practitioner.

"Is Dr. Whitelaw in?" he asked of the severe-looking manservant who opened the door.

"No, sir," was the reply. "He is away in the country."

Jack was disappointed.

"Has Mrs. Whitelaw gone also?" he inquired.

"No, sir; but I do not think she is receiving this evening. However, if you will step inside, I will inquire."

He ushered Jack into the hall and went away with slow and solemn steps, apparently considering that any show of haste would be a sacrilege in this dignified household. He was gone for nearly ten minutes and Armitage began to chafe at the delay, when he returned and announced that Mrs. Whitelaw would see her visitor.

Jack was shown into a room that only an artist could have furnished. The colouring was all browns and oranges merging into each other with great effect. The furniture was harmonious and restful, and not a piece was out of place. Some exquisite ivory statuettes added to the distinction of the room and one magnificent marble statue stood before a curtained alcove. Jack had always felt a sense of pleasure whenever he entered this beautiful apartment.

A young woman was awaiting his coming. She was only a few

months older than he, but was nevertheless married to the famous specialist who was more than double her age. She was beautiful, in a fair, musical comedy sort of way, and had been the petted and pampered doll of a crowd of admirers before Whitelaw, to the astonishment of all who knew him, had walked in and married her. She was so much younger than he and so much the wrong type for a man of his strong, almost overbearing character, that the social world was astonished. The younger generation agreed that she had married him for his money — her father was a retired Army man who had little more than his pension to live on — the older generation, and they mostly comprised his own colleagues, shrugged their shoulders, muttered unkind things about there being "no fool like an old fool," and gave it up.

Jack's father and David Whitelaw were firm friends, and Jack himself had always been a favourite of the specialist. It was because of the pleasure that he knew his triumph would give to the latter that he had called. There was no particular friendship between him and Patricia Whitelaw, although he admired her as any young man would admire a beautiful woman. She regarded cricket as a bore, and it was more from a sense of respect than anything else that he had asked for her after hearing that the doctor was away.

She greeted him without much enthusiasm and gave him a seat some distance from her own. Jack thought she seemed agitated and uneasy, her bosom appearing to rise and fall with unnecessary rapidity, whilst she spoke in quick, short sentences and without much regard for the subjects they were discussing.

Boylike he blundered into a tactless question.

"Is there anything wrong ?" he asked.

She raised her big blue eyes to his, and there was a look almost of fear in them.

"No; of course not," she said hurriedly. "Why do you ask ?"

He laughed in an embarrassed manner.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I suppose you gave me the feeling that something had startled you. You seem so troubled."

"Don't be foolish !" She spoke almost sharply. "It is hardly likely that your coming would trouble me, is it ?"

Armitage blundered still further.

"I was not thinking of myself," he remarked. "I — "

This time she was really perturbed.

"What do you mean by that ?" she demanded.

He looked at her in surprise.

"I meant to explain that I thought you were worried," he said slowly. "I naturally did not think for a moment that my visit could have upset you. But if — "

He was interrupted by a sudden peal of silvery laughter — her laugh was the envy of all her girl friends.

"You silly boy," she said. "Of course I am not worried, and I certainly am not dismayed by your visit. I really think you have caught a touch of the sun. Tell me about the match !"

Jack willingly launched into a graphic description of the game in which he had taken so prominent a part, but it soon became evident that she was not listening and eventually, cutting his narrative as short as possible, he rose to take his leave. He thought he detected a sigh of relief as she held out her hand to him.

"You must come again," she said, "as soon as David returns. I think you will find him a great deal more — "

She stopped suddenly and pressed her hand to her bosom. Her face had gone a ghastly white and she looked as though she were about to faint.

"Don't go — yet !" she gasped.

"Are you ill ?" he cried in alarm, putting his arm round her to steady her as she staggered.

Before she could reply, they heard the opening and closing of the front door and a sharp word of command. The next moment the drawing-room door was flung open and David Whitelaw stood on the threshold. He was apparently in a state of great excitement for his hair was ruffled, his tie untidy and his general appearance quite the antithesis of that smartness for which he was so noted. He stood for a moment gazing at his wife and her companion, and his eyes dropped so pointedly to the protective arm which Jack still held round her that the latter removed it hastily as though he had been caught in the act of doing something wrong. But now a look of amazement began to overspread the doctor's face. He came into the room and quietly closed the door behind him.

"My God !" he exclaimed; then again, "My God !"

Armitage felt that he ought to say something but for the life of him could think of nothing to say. The situation was quite beyond him. For a whole minute there was silence — a silence that suggested the presence of something ugly. At last Whitelaw spoke, and his first words only mystified Jack the more.

"Of all the men upon whom I speculated, Armitage," he said in a voice vibrant with suffering, "you were one of the very few of whose integrity I felt absolutely certain."

Jack frowned in perplexity.

"I'm afraid I don't understand, sir," he said.

Whitelaw sank into a chair, and looked at him steadily.

"I suppose," he remarked, "that a fellow would lie, and lie desperately, to save himself when caught in your situation."

A flush came over the young man's face, and he drew himself up proudly.

"You must be either mad," he said, "or there is some mystery here which I do not understand."

"Mystery !" sneered the doctor. "God help me to keep my hands off you. I have all along thought you were a true son of your father; that you were going to prove all he hoped for from you, and this is the result. It will break his heart when he knows, as it broke my heart when I knew — about my wife."

Jack felt that he was living in a land of gross unreality. Always a quick-tempered man, his ire was beginning to rise and hot words were trembling on his lips. However, he managed to choke them down for the time being, and turned to the girl who had sunk into an armchair and was hiding her face in her hands.

"Mrs. Whitelaw," he said calmly enough, "perhaps you will be good enough to explain the meaning of this extraordinary scene ?"

His question threw the doctor into a rage. He sprang up and crossed to Jack in half-a-dozen rapid strides.

"You damned hypocrite !" he shouted. "How long are you going to continue this farce of pretended blamelessness. Patricia, at least, is honest enough not to deny her guilt — her very attitude proves it. And you — you, in your infernally vile manner, leave her to her fate and try to wriggle out with a pretence of sancti-

monious innocence, and that after betraying your father's oldest friend. You cur — you low-down cur !"

His voice reached a staccato note in his agitation and he raised his arm as though he would strike Armitage. The latter stepped back instinctively. Rather to his own surprise, he still had his temper under control. A glimmer of the meaning of the doctor's anger was beginning to penetrate to his brain.

"Am I right," he asked, "in supposing that you are accusing me of behaving towards Mrs. Whitelaw in an ungentlemanly manner ?"

"Of behaving in an ungentlemanly manner," repeated the doctor. "My God ! Can it be possible that she has not told you of my suspicions ? Listen then, and I will confront you with your own infamy. For some time past I had reason to suspect that she was not being faithful to me. I told her of my suspicions but she hotly denied them. However, I have had her watched and evidence came into my hands quite recently that she was spending a great deal of her time with a tall, clean-shaven man — even with the description I never thought of you ! Yesterday I left to attend an urgent case in the country and this morning I received a telegram asking me to return to London as soon as possible. I arrived back at five and have been closeted with my agent for over an hour. During that time he put ample proof into my hands that on two occasions you and she spent weekends together under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Webster, while I, poor fool, was away on consultations. I returned here hardly expecting to find the man I was after embracing my wife — and that man *you !*"

Patricia Whitelaw had risen to her feet during the recital of her misdeeds and a gasp of horror burst from her lips as she was made aware of her husband's knowledge. By this time Armitage was rapidly losing control of himself and, almost before the doctor had finished, he sprang to his side.

"It's a lie !" he thundered. "An absolute, damnable lie ! Mrs. Whitelaw and I were never anything but the merest friends; in fact our intimacy hardly went beyond that of casual acquaintances."

"Your intimacy," said David Whitelaw in slow, measured

tones, "went to the extent of your becoming paramours."

Patricia drew back with a little cry; Jack's face went bloodless, his mouth becoming a mere slit. For a moment or two he fought to keep back the terrible anger that was raging within him, then:

"Take back that word," he ground out, "or I will ram it down your throat!"

The doctor regarded him without the slightest alarm.

"I will not take it back," he said. "Rather I will add, that now I have said what I had to say you can go — and you can take your mistress with you!"

There was the flash of an arm, a groan, and David Whitelaw crashed to the floor and lay still, with Jack standing over him swaying slightly, his eyes a little bloodshot. Patricia gave a cry, half sob, half scream, and went down on her knees by her husband's side.

"Oh, what have you done?" she whispered hoarsely. "Is he — is he dead?"

"Of course not," answered Jack shortly. "Stunned, that's all. He'll be all right in a minute. I'm sorry now I hit him, but — "

"Oh, please go! please go!" she cried.

"Very well," he nodded.

At that moment Whitelaw opened his eyes and looked at him. He felt his jaw tenderly.

"So apparently," he remarked, "you are not only a cur, but a coward as well. What a surprise your father will have when he hears of the exploits of his famous son."

"I am very sorry, sir," said Jack humbly. "I would not have hit you for anything in the world."

"Get out of my house!" cried the doctor, rising on to his elbow.

With a feeling of the deepest resentment and anger, Jack turned without another word and made his way into the hall. Here he found two menservants, who regarded him askance. Apparently they had heard all, or part, of the quarrel. One handed him his hat; the other opened the door for him.

Outside the taxicab was still waiting. He climbed in and was driven to Northumberland Avenue, feeling like a man who had been through hell.

CHAPTER II

ARRESTED

Feeling thoroughly sick at heart, Armitage avoided the public as much as possible when he reached his hotel, and went straight to his room. He ordered a whisky and soda, and sat down to think things over. His brain was in a whirl, and he found it almost impossible to pick out one coherent thought from the mass of chaotic reflections which floated through his mind. His deepest impression was one of disgust at being mixed up in such a sordid affair, but behind that was the bitter pain of realization that Doctor Whitelaw, who had known him since he was born, who had played with him, treated him as he would his own son, had believed him capable of such despicable conduct. At first he was inclined to let his thoughts run riot in mordant acrimony of the doctor's behaviour, but calmer reason prevailed at last. He strove to put himself in the other's place; to feel as a man must feel who has been robbed of his wife's constancy; and presently, rather to his own surprise, he found himself actually sympathizing with Whitelaw. It was the woman who was to blame. There was small doubt but that she was guilty — her whole demeanour had given her away. Jack's deeply hurt soul turned on her in caustic vituperation. She had actually stood by and listened to his being pilloried without saying the slightest word in his favour. In fact, by her silence, she had tacitly acknowledged him as her illicit lover and had thereby protected the scoundrel who was behind it all. In his wrath Jack rose from his armchair and strode about his room fuming with the natural indignation of a man whose honour had been badly besmirched. Of course, everything would be put right — it must be. The girl must be made to

speak and to remove for ever the stain of perfidy and concupiscence which, by her silence, she had cast upon him. He would tell his father everything and leave him to suggest the remedy. That was it: he would leave for the country first thing in the morning and take the pater into his confidence.

Having made this resolution Jack felt infinitely better. He had unbounded faith in Sir John Armitage. It never even occurred to him that his father would believe in his guilt. They had always been such pals and understood each other perfectly. The young cricketer was inordinately proud of his famous sire, and the latter had the same pride in his son. Despite the fact that Sir John had made a great name as a soldier, he had a keen desire to see Jack in the Diplomatic Service, and the latter's education had been devised with that object in view. Now that the young man had come down from the varsity all arrangements were being made, and as soon as the cricket season was over, or after he had returned from the Australian tour, if selected, he was to take up his duties.

Jack had a dinner engagement and, with the facility of the young, he succeeded in shaking a good proportion of his troubles off his shoulders by the time he had dressed. Over dinner the high spirits and hearty congratulations of his friends — they were all old "Blues" — practically dissipated all lingering bitterness, and he went on to a theatre feeling thoroughly pleased with life — except perhaps for a momentary pang — and, if the truth be told, a certain amount of the very common, but in his case quite forgivable, disease known as swelled head.

He and his friends took a box, and settled down to enjoy the show. It was a rather insipid musical comedy, but they managed to get a good deal of pleasure out of it. The third act had commenced when there was a knock at the door of the box and five lusty voices called, "Come in!" An attendant accepted the invitation.

"Is Mr. Armitage here?" he asked.

"Talking to you," replied Jack promptly.

The man hesitated.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, sir," he said, "but you are wanted outside."

"I'm surprised at you, Armitage," remarked one of the party. "If it's a girl, get rid of her. Tonight's our night !"

Jack smiled pleasantly.

"Not likely to be a girl, you chaps," he replied. "I'll go and see who wants me and be back in a jiffy."

He accompanied the attendant to the passage outside the box.

"Who is it ?" he asked curiously.

The man looked round before speaking, then lowered his voice to a whisper.

"It's two detectives, sir," he said.

Jack glared at him in astonishment.

"Two detectives !" he repeated.

"Yes, sir. I don't know what it's all about, sir, but if you're in trouble of any sort, let me know. There's a way out, down the stairs and near the stage door. If you say the word I'll help you to slip out. I saw you play in the trial match and, if you don't mind me saying so, sir, you're too good a man to get mixed up with the police."

Jack smiled.

"Awfully good of you," he said, "but I'm not in trouble as far as I know. Where are these — detectives ?"

"In the dress circle lounge, sir."

"Right !"

Wondering what detectives could possibly want with him, Jack followed the attendant up the stairs. With the exception of a couple of men, who wore an unmistakable air of officialdom about them, and three powdered and peroxided ladies behind the bar, the place was deserted. Jack went up to the two detectives.

"My name is Armitage," he said. "I understand that you wish to see me ?"

"That is so," said the shorter of the two, a man with a large drooping moustache, who was wearing a bowler hat that seemed two sizes too small for him.

He took Jack by the arm and walked him to a remote corner of the lounge, followed by his companion.

"I have a warrant for your arrest," he announced.

Armitage stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Did you say a warrant for my arrest ?" he asked after a pause.

The detective nodded.

"But there must be some mistake, or is it a practical joke ?"

"No joke about this," was the uncompromising reply. "You're John Armitage, aren't you ?"

Jack nodded slowly, a feeling of numbness stealing over him.

"Then, John Armitage," went on the inexorable voice of the law, "I arrest you on the charge of having caused the death of David Whitelaw, medical practitioner of Wimpole Street, at or about seven o'clock this evening."

"My God !" cried Jack and sank on to a settee.

For a moment the suddenness of it all entirely bereft him of speech then, springing up:

"But he wasn't dead," he cried. "I — "

The detective interrupted him brusquely.

"Take my advice, young man," he said, "and keep quiet ! It is my duty to warn you that anything you say will be taken down and used in evidence against you."

"You can't be serious. How can Dr. Whitelaw possibly be dead ? He was all right when I left — spoke to me — "

"Nevertheless he is dead — very dead," observed the officer drily, "and evidence points to you as being responsible for his death. I am afraid I shall have to ask you to accompany me to the station."

"I must tell my friends that I — that I shan't be back," said Jack wretchedly.

"Write a note and send it along by the attendant," suggested the detective. "It will save you having to face them and answer awkward questions."

Armitage looked at him gratefully, and borrowed a sheet of paper and a pencil from one of the barmaids.

"Sorry, you fellows," he wrote, "but something rather serious has happened, and I have to rush away. Cheerho !"

That was all, nothing else. He could not bear to spoil a cheery party by telling them that he had been arrested, and perhaps there was a mistake after all and they need never know. He handed the folded scrap of paper to the attendant, who still hovered in the background, and asked him to take it to the box. Then turning to the police officers:

"I am quite ready," he said simply.

He was taken to his hotel and allowed to pack a few articles in a suit case; then was conveyed to West London police station in a taxi. Here the charge was read out and a perfunctory search followed. Since leaving the theatre Jack had not uttered a word. He felt absolutely stunned by the catastrophe that had befallen him; something seemed to be hammering letters of fire into his brain, and those letters read — "David Whitelaw is dead ! David Whitelaw is dead !"

Having handed over their prisoner to the sergeant on duty, the two detectives took their leave. The former was a portly man who looked as though he had grown up with his desk, so exactly did he fit into it. Years spent in contemplating the sordid side of life had not robbed him of his humanity, and the look he directed at the hopelessly dejected young man, standing so miserably by the side of a station constable, was full of sympathy and kindliness.

"This is a bad business, Mr. Armitage," he said, "a very bad business. Never mind, it might have been worse, and p'raps it'll end all right. Now is there anything I can do for you — communicate with relatives or your lawyer, or anything like that ?"

Jack managed to pull himself together sufficiently to send a message to his father's lawyer. He was then escorted to a cell and locked up for the night.

At three o'clock the lawyer arrived, very much rattled and pale. He was a thin man with wisps of fair hair straggling over his forehead, and a pair of watery blue eyes partially hidden behind pince-nez. For years he had been in the confidence of the Armitage family and probably knew more about the extent of their finances than they did themselves, for Sir John Armitage was a very wealthy man, having inherited over a million pounds sterling from a maiden aunt some years before.

The lawyer was shown into Jack's cell by the burly sergeant who, by some means known only to himself, had extricated his huge bulk from its anchorage between the desk and the stool.

"There you are, sir," he said cheerfully. "Make yourself at home. Sorry we can't give the young man better quarters, but he

won't be here long. This is only a bad dream and he'll laugh about it later on."

And locking the lawyer in the cell with his client the kindly sergeant walked down the passage whistling cheerfully, stopping once or twice to pass facetious remarks to imprisoned occupants of other cells.

On the solicitor's entrance Jack had sprung to his feet eagerly, and now poured out his heart to the dazed man of law, who listened without interruption. He told everything, omitting only the cause of his quarrel with Whitelaw. It had occurred to him that he could not possibly drag Patricia Whitelaw's name, guilty though she was, into such a sordid affair. It was up to her to clear him by making a full statement, and no doubt she would, but there was no reason, was there, why he should mention the unsavoury accusations which Whitelaw had brought against her?

"This is a terribly serious matter," said Mr. Renfrew, when his client had completed his recital. "There is no doubt that Dr. Whitelaw is dead. I made full inquiries before coming here, and it appears that when you hit him and knocked him down, the back of his head struck against the base of a large marble statue; his skull was fractured and he died almost immediately."

Jack stared at him in amazement.

"But he did not fall anywhere near the statue," he protested vehemently. "I know the one you mean: it stands near the alcove and represents the figure of liberty — in fact it is a small replica of the statue in New York harbour."

"My dear boy, it is obvious that he did. I understand that the base is covered with blood. It has been examined by two doctors, and they both agree that his death was undoubtedly caused by his head coming into contact with the corner of the pedestal."

This new development took away Jack's breath. He began to think that he must have gone mad; that the hideous phantasmagoria of events since he had left Lords were only part of the lunacy which had ended in placing him in a police cell on a charge of manslaughter. He suddenly threw himself back on his cot and shook with laughter. Renfrew became almost petrified with alarm. Never in the whole of his life had he heard anything so

terrible in its bitterness as that sound. Along the gallery, where so many criminals and would-be criminals were awaiting justice, it fell with deafening effect. In the next cell an old lag had been cursing the police; on the other side a drunkard had been singing in loud, raucous tones; others had been calling out, laughing or talking; from somewhere had come the sound of whimpering. But the laugh had produced a deadly silence. Presently came the old lag's voice in awe-stricken accents.

"My Gawd!" it said. "If that noise ain't comin' right from 'ell, my name ain't Ted Sturgess!"

"You're right!" cried Jack grimly — he had stopped laughing as suddenly as he had begun — "It came from the very depths of hell!"

"Control yourself, my boy!" pleaded the lawyer. "We have to face this thing and fight our way out, and it will require all your courage. Tell me what was the cause of your quarrel with Whitelaw!"

"Does it matter?" asked Armitage listlessly.

"It matters a great deal. It may make all the difference to your case."

"Look here!" exclaimed Jack. "I don't care what doctors or anybody else say. I admit I hit Whitelaw, and pretty hard too, but his head did not strike the statue. In fact he was only stunned and came round in less than a minute. Then he spoke to me, and I apologized for hitting him."

Renfrew looked at him doubtfully.

"Can you prove that?" he asked.

"Of course. Mrs. Whitelaw was there and saw everything."

The lawyer became almost cheerful.

"That makes a great difference," he declared. "Er — was the quarrel in any way connected with Mrs. Whitelaw?"

Jack ignored the direct question.

"There wasn't really a quarrel," he said. "Old Whitelaw made a vile accusation against me; I lost my temper and hit him — that's all."

"What was the accusation?"

"I'd rather not say."

Renfrew sighed.

"Ah, well," he said, "we shall have to get that out of Mrs. Whitelaw. Don't worry, my boy, your statement has certainly cleared the air a great deal and, of course, Mrs. Whitelaw will verify what you say. The thing that puzzles me is how Whitelaw died. It is possible that he rose to his feet after you had gone — you say you left him lying on the floor ?"

Jack nodded.

"And," continued the lawyer, "probably feeling shaky, he stumbled and fell with his head against the statue. That again will depend upon Mrs. Whitelaw's evidence. If it is so, then I think we shall be able to clear you, for they cannot hold you responsible for the second fall."

The genial face of the sergeant appeared between the bars.

"What about it, gentlemen ?" he asked.

"I am just coming, sergeant," said Renfrew. "I must try to arrange bail for Mr. Armitage."

"Shouldn't worry about it now, sir, if I was you. The young gentleman'll be brought up and remanded first thing in the morning, and then you can make what arrangements you like. He'll be comfortable enough here till then, and you can see that breakfast is sent in to him if you like."

The lawyer looked inquiringly at Jack.

"The sergeant is right," agreed the latter. "It's hardly worth while getting me out now, if I have to appear in the court in the morning."

"Very well," nodded Renfrew. "I'll see about breakfast for you and meet you in the court."

He shook hands with Jack and left the cell. The sergeant lingered before locking the door.

"I've just had a pint of beer sent along with my supper," he stated. "Shall I bring you along some of it ? It'll do you a power of good and help you to sleep."

Jack smiled wanly at the generosity of the man.

"No thanks," he replied. "It's jolly good of you to offer it, but I don't think I could face beer just now."

"Just as you like," said the cheery officer. "Well, get to sleep, and don't you worry ! A great cricketer like you ain't going to be upset by a little thing like this. Good-night !"

Jack listened to the receding footsteps of the genial sergeant, and wondered if all policemen were as humane. The decency with which he had been treated stood out like a bright light amidst the gloom of his misery. Presently he lay down on the hard pallet and, in order to efface the anguish of his mind, if only for a little while, tried hard to sleep. For a long time he was unsuccessful, but at last sheer mental fatigue had its way and he dropped off into a troubled slumber. His last waking thought was a resolve to fight to the bitter end whatever was in store for him.

"I'll keep up my wicket," he murmured, "no matter what bowling they can put on against me."

CHAPTER III

THE ANGER OF SIR JOHN

Jack Armitage came out of the court room and stood on the pavement drinking in great draughts of air. He felt as though he had been nearly stifled by the noxious atmosphere of the prison cell and that he must get all the unpleasantness out of his lungs. Renfrew stood by his side and watched him sympathetically. The young cricketer had been brought up and charged with manslaughter, but the proceedings had only occupied a few minutes. The police had given formal evidence of arrest and had asked for a remand, whereupon Renfrew had promptly applied for bail. It had been granted only after a long discussion and on very heavy sureties.

"What are your plans ?" asked the lawyer.

"I am going to the hotel to collect my traps," was the immediate answer, "after which I will catch the first train home."

"The very best thing you can do," agreed Renfrew. "If I were you I should stay there until the case comes up again. I will set to work to make arrangements for your defence and will probably come down to Aylesbury in two or three days' time. I sent a long wire to your father early this morning in order that he would be prepared before the newspapers arrived."

Jack made a grimace of despair.

"Of course," he said. "I forgot that this would be in the papers."

"I'm afraid it will be regarded as sensational news," murmured the lawyer. "You see, Doctor Whitelaw was a very famous physician, and you not only belong to a well-known family, but are better known to the average man in the street than the doctor.

In these days great footballers and cricketers are far more spoken about than statesmen or diplomats."

"Spare me that," pleaded Jack. "I feel that I want to get away from everybody and hide myself in the deepest hole I can find."

At that moment a newsboy ran up shouting something unintelligible in a hoarse voice. He thrust a paper into Jack's hand and, as he faced round, the latter caught sight of the placard he was carrying. On it in large characters was printed:

DEATH OF FAMOUS PHYSICIAN
WELL-KNOWN CRICKETER CHARGED WITH MANSLAUGHTER

Armitage took the paper mechanically, gave the yelling boy a coin, and sprang into an empty taxicab that was passing at that moment. Back in his hotel he hastily packed and, descending to the office, paid his bill, and pretended not to notice the stares of the officials and guests round him. Once on his way to Marylebone he sighed with relief, but he did not feel safe from recognition until he was ensconced in an otherwise empty first class compartment, and on his way to Aylesbury.

Sir John Armitage, to his great joy, was awaiting his arrival in the little market town, and the greeting between father and son was typical.

"Hullo, Dad!" said Jack.

"Fine display of yours at Lords, my boy. By Gad, I wish that infernal gout hadn't prevented my coming. They can't keep you out of the team for Australia after this."

"How's the gout now, Dad?"

"Better, Jack, better, but still troublesome. Still I had to come and meet you this morning."

Leaning heavily on a stick, and with his other arm linked in his son's, the General walked to his waiting car. Every now and then he looked from left to right, and there was a look of grim inquiry in his face, as though he were tacitly challenging anyone to dare come up and malign his son in his presence.

Sir John's estate was five miles from Aylesbury, between the villages of Haddenham and Cuddington but, with the exception of occasional references to the cricket match and local affairs, the

journey was passed in silence. It was not until father and son had entered the great manor house and Jack had been warmly welcomed by the old butler, who strove by every means in his power, short of actually expressing himself verbally, to show his sympathy, that any reference was made to the tragic happenings of the previous day.

"Come into the library, Jack !" invited Sir John.

The great room with its high, stained-glass windows; its comfortable leather armchairs, heavy oaken furniture, deep carpet, majestic fireplace and thousands of books, did more to give Jack a sense of security than anything else could have done. Sitting opposite to his father in that well-loved apartment he felt as though his mind had been considerably lightened. It was home — his home — and the happiest days of his life had been spent in these surroundings. He glanced across at the man of whom he was so proud and a smile — rather tremulous perhaps, but still a smile — came into his face.

"It's good to be back, Dad," he said. "I feel as though I had been away for years instead of for just a few days."

Sir John nodded.

"Tell me all about it, Jack !" he prompted.

Quietly and without hesitation the young man told his story. He began from the time he had called at Dr. Whitelaw's house, described his welcome by Mrs. Whitelaw, and her curious agitation culminating in her fear when she knew her husband had returned. This time he did not omit a word of the accusations which the doctor had levelled against him, but was careful to repeat, as far as he could remember, everything that had been said. He went on to describe how he had lost his temper and eventually knocked down David Whitelaw.

Sir John listened without interruption, except to make various sounds expressive of his profound disgust when he heard of the innuendos cast at his son, and to mutter, "Damned if I can blame you," as Jack described how he had knocked down the specialist.

"You can imagine how I felt, Dad," concluded Jack, "when I was arrested at the theatre and told that I was the cause of poor old Whitelaw's death. It's a lie," he added vehemently, "a damnable, rotten lie ! The doctor was as well as I am when I left him.

Renfrew says he must have got up and fallen again to strike his head against the pedestal of that statue."

"Renfrew is probably right," declared Sir John.

Jack laughed bitterly.

"He was killed by the statue of liberty," he groaned, "and I — I have lost my freedom and a lot of my self-respect on account of that statue of liberty. Oh, the rotten irony of it all!"

He put his head between his hands, and a half sob broke from his lips.

"Bear up, old chap!" said Sir John, limping across the room and placing his hand affectionately on the bowed shoulder of his son. "You've done nothing to be ashamed of. I'm surprised at Whitelaw making such accusations against you, after knowing you since you were a baby. Good God! he must have been drunk. . . But I suppose one must not speak disrespectfully of the dead," he added as an afterthought.

"Then you don't believe in my guilt?" asked Jack eagerly.

Sir John snorted with indignation.

"How dare you ask such a question?" he demanded. "Believe my own son could be guilty of — of a thing like that! Why I'd sooner believe myself capable of it. No, Jack, we Armitages are not libertines and we don't lie, though we may have many other faults. Did David seem intoxicated when he entered the room?"

"No, Dad; just rather excitable that's all. He certainly seemed amazed to find me there."

"And, like a fool, jumped to the conclusion that you were the scoundrel who had taken Patricia from him. Well, he's paid for his folly, poor chap."

"Don't, Dad!" cried Jack, and there was a look of pain in his eyes.

"Sorry, my boy. I didn't mean to hurt you — I'm a bigger fool than anyone."

Leaning heavily on his stick he moved slowly up and down the long room.

"It seems strange to think of poor David being dead," he muttered more to himself than to Jack. "Gad! He and I have been pretty thick for more years than I care to think of. . . And my son

accused of causing his death !" He turned to Jack, "When is the funeral ?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't know, sir."

"Humph ! Probably the day after tomorrow. I must find out and go, and I must have a long chat with that wife of his — never did like her. She is the only person who can put matters right for you and, by Gad ! she is going to do it !" .

"You understand, sir," said Jack earnestly, "that whatever happens, I can't drag her name in the mud. Whatever she has done, she must be protected — she's a woman, you see, and his wife."

Sir John looked at him, and his eyes were very soft and gentle.

"That goes without saying, my boy," he said quietly. "You can't possibly try to save yourself by telling the court of her infidelities, and I doubt very much if it would help you even if you did. No; she is the one to speak. If she has real moral courage, she will tell the truth; if she hasn't she can protect herself as she likes, but she must save your honour. Above all she must tell the truth about poor David's death."

Sir John Armitage was almost the antithesis of his son. He was slim and not more than five feet seven inches in height. His hair was nearly white above his temples and iron grey at the back of his head, while on top he was going bald. He had somewhat bushy eyebrows also iron grey, a small grey military moustache, penetrating grey-blue eyes and a reddish face. His features were regular and essentially aristocratic and he carried himself, despite his recurrent attacks of gout, as a soldier should. He had risen to the rank of Lieutenant-General and had retired when still spoken of as one of the greatest soldiers of his day, and probable future Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. Being a cavalry man he had heartily disagreed with the reduction of the cavalry establishment and the proposed mechanization of the Army, and that had brought about his early retirement soon after the War. But it was an open secret that a very responsible billet at the War Office would be awaiting him should he become tired of his self-imposed inactivity. All his hopes and aspirations were centred in his only son, and when he had received the lawyer's telegram, and later read the newspapers, he had become so

convulsed with rage and indignation that even the butler, who had been his batman and confidential servant during the whole of his Army career and afterwards, could not recollect a parallel. Not for one moment did he think that there was the slightest truth in the accusations brought against Jack, and the latter felt an infinite solace to his bruised heart in the knowledge of his father's faith in him.

It was not long before the affair became one of the chief topics of the day. Following, as it did, Jack's great triumph in the trial match at Lords, it caused a profound sensation. The newspapers were not backward in producing long articles concerning the careers of both Dr. Whitelaw and Jack Armitage, and formulating theories about the quarrel. Nothing came to light as to the allegations made by the specialist against his wife and the young cricketer, and when it became known how friendly the two families had always been there was a good deal of mystification. One or two of the papers may have suspected, or imagined, what had taken place, but none of them had the temerity to put their suspicions into cold print.

In many ways the inquest was rather a curious affair and, if anything, left the public more perplexed than ever. Jack Armitage was present but was not called upon to give evidence. Mrs. Whitelaw was only asked a few casual questions which gave little indication of the direction her evidence would tend at the resumed hearing in the magistrate's court. Stress was laid only on the fact that her husband and Armitage had quarrelled and that the latter had knocked down the former. The doctors described how they had found the body and the cause of death. The whole proceedings were over in a quarter of an hour, with a verdict of manslaughter against Jack.

Renfrew, who had never previously had anything to do with a criminal case, called in the aid of a well-known criminal lawyer and the two of them set to work assiduously to plan young Armitage's defence. But at the outset their efforts received a serious set back. They recognized that the key of the position was with Patricia Whitelaw, and separately and together they called on her, but she refused to see them. Renfrew wrote a strong letter in which he informed her that they were depending on her for the

defence of their client. The letter remained unanswered. To add to their difficulties the police were remarkably reticent about the matter and very little was to be learned from headquarters. The result was that when the case was due to come up again before the magistrates, Renfrew and his colleague were ill-prepared.

The funeral of Dr. Whitelaw was attended by a vast crowd. The medical profession was strongly represented as were various other sciences in which the dead man had been interested. Sir John Armitage was one of the mourners and, despite his gout, followed the coffin to the grave-side and took an active part in the obsequies. Mrs. Whitelaw was not present, it being reported that she was prostrated with grief and shock. Sir John refused to be influenced by the news and, as soon as the funeral was over, drove straight to Wimpole Street. His ring was answered by the severe-looking butler, who had admitted Jack on the fatal day of David Whitelaw's death. He bowed as he recognized the General.

"I regret that Mrs. Whitelaw is unable to see you, sir," he said.

"Nonsense, my good man," said the old soldier. "Take my card in to her at once !"

"I am sorry, sir, but I can assure you my mistress is in a state of collapse, and cannot — "

Sir John clicked his tongue impatiently.

"Do what I tell you !" he ordered. "She is not so bad that she cannot see me."

The man looked perturbed.

"My orders were quite definite, sir," he said, but a lot of his confidence had evaporated. "I was told to admit no-one, and your name was given to me as the gentleman I was to be most particular in refusing."

The General snorted with rage.

"The idea," he snapped. "Refusing admission to her husband's oldest friend. Well, I'm going in whether you like it or not."

And he stepped into the hall. The butler made a feeble effort to stop him, but he was brushed aside as though he had been an article of furniture.

"Where is your mistress ?" demanded Sir John.

"In her private drawing-room, sir."

The General knew the house perfectly and, without another

word, turned and walked up the stairs, followed by the protesting manservant. He knocked on the door of Patricia's boudoir and a languid voice bade him enter. Dressed in deep mourning, she was lying on a couch in a setting which showed off her beauty to perfection. With the predominant colouring of pale blue, the priceless hangings, rare mezzotints and engravings, Louis Seize furniture, and Persian rugs formed a perfect environment for her loveliness.

As she recognized her visitor her face turned pale and she sprang to her feet with a cry of alarm.

"Not in quite such a state of collapse as I feared," commented the General. "Have you any objection to my coming in ?"

"What is the meaning of — of this intrusion, Sir John ?" she asked. "I gave orders that I was not to be disturbed."

"Quite so," he replied, "and your butler was given special instructions with regard to myself."

"Surely you can understand my feelings," she said. "My husband's death has — "

She stopped and gently dabbed her eyes with a tiny lace handkerchief. Sir John closed the door, and advanced into the room.

"I quite understand your feelings, Patricia," he remarked. "In the circumstances, who has a better right to be with you, and comfort you, than your husband's oldest friend ?"

She drew herself up and a look of scorn curled her perfectly shaped lips.

"After your son had — " she began, but an imperious gesture silenced her.

"Be careful what you say about my son !" warned the General. His voice was perfectly calm and natural but there was a look in his eyes that frightened her. "My son," he went on after a moment or two, "has told me exactly what occurred on that tragic evening. He doesn't lie, and I know that David, in his excitement, mistook him for the real scoundrel who had been philandering with his wife."

Her eyes flashed some indefinable look at him — it may have been sheer indignation; it looked like hatred.

"How dare you !" she cried. "Oh, how dare you !"

"Sit down, my dear !" The General still spoke quite coolly.

For a moment she hesitated, then sank on to the settee. He selected a chair close by and sat looking at her for several seconds before speaking, then:

"I do not want to enter into a discussion about your morality," he said; "that is a question for your own conscience. I am here to save my son's name. By a most infernal circumstance he became mixed up in a very sordid affair and, in his natural indignation, knocked down David Whitelaw. He left him a little bit shaken, perhaps, but otherwise quite well. Later he was arrested for David's manslaughter. I want to know the truth! How did Whitelaw die?"

"Your son killed him," she replied in slow, measured tones. "When he fell, his head struck the pedestal of the statue in the drawing-room. He regained consciousness for a minute or two, and even ordered Jack Armitage from the house — then he died."

As she spoke the General's face turned white and he grew quite haggard. He suddenly looked ten years older.

"Do you mean to say," he whispered, "that you will lie like that? Isn't there a tiny shred of honesty in you that will help you to tell the truth and save my son?"

"I am telling the truth," she declared defiantly. "How else do you think David died? If he were only a little bit shaken when he was knocked down, wouldn't he be alive and well now?"

"Our theory," said Sir John, "was that he rose to his feet, stumbled, and fell again with his head against the statue."

"A very likely theory," she sneered.

"But," cried the old soldier, "Jack said definitely that he did not fall anywhere near the statue."

"Then Jack lied." She laughed in a hard voice. "Naturally he would to save himself."

"My son does not lie," he snapped. He sat facing her with clenched hands, fighting for self-control; then: "Do you mean to say that you will tell that story to the magistrate?" he demanded.

"Certainly, if I have to give evidence; just as I would have done at the inquest, if I had been asked."

Sir John rose to his feet and paced the room. The agony on his face was pitiful to see, his soldierly figure was bent, and his

keenness added to the pallor of his bearing. She watched him with a cruel smile on her lips until suddenly he turned and faced her, and there was that in his expression which caused her to clutch the arm of the settee in quick alarm.

"My God, madam!" he thundered. "We Armitages have never fought with women, but I swear to you that if any harm comes to my son through you, you will repent it to your dying day. Take your chance now and tell the truth—or God help you!"

She watched the working of his face in a sort of horrified fascination. Gone was the agony, gone was the pallor. She was gazing at the face of a man of indomitable will, a man who would stop at nothing to protect those dear to him. After a tense pause he went on in a quieter voice.

"You will cover your own filthy accusancy in any way you think fit," he said, "but you must tell the truth of Whitelaw's death. If you don't, then I'll kill you with my own hands, if I have to follow you to your own particular hell to do it."

She stood up, and made one last desperate effort to assert herself.

"You're mad," she cried, "absolutely mad to speak to me like this. And let me tell you, Sir John, that no coercion or threats on your part will cause me to alter my mind."

For a moment he actually looked like a madman. He caught her by the shoulders and glared at her with fierce desperation. She started to scream but he flung an arm across her mouth. For the fraction of a second she was looking at death and she knew it. Then his whole body relaxed and he dropped her on to the couch, where she lay sobbing out the terror which had overcome her. He watched her for a while, then picked up his hat and stick.

"God help me!" he muttered brokenly. "I have never treated a woman like that before." Once again he drew himself up and the harsh note returned to his voice. "But remember what I have said," he added. "You have had ample proof to make you realise that my threat is no empty one. If you do not go into the witness box and tell the truth, then I will hound you down and make you suffer for every moment of suffering you have caused my son. And if I am not spared to see the thing through to the bitter end,

I will take steps to ensure that Jack himself will. Do you understand ?"

She went on sobbing quietly.

"Do you understand ?" he repeated harshly.

"Yes," she whispered, "I — I understand."

Without another word he walked out of the room and down the stairs. He ignored the respectful salutes of the servants, hobbled down the steps of the house, and entered his car.

"Home !" he ordered shortly.

A few minutes before he arrived back at Clifton Hall, a telegram had come for Jack, and the General entered the house to find his son sitting dejectedly in a great oak chair, holding the flimsy sheet of paper in his hand. Sir John glanced with quick concern at the young cricketer, and crossed the hall with anxious footsteps.

"What is it, old chap ?" he asked.

For answer Jack handed him the telegram. The general read it, and turned away to hide the mistiness that suddenly appeared in his eyes. It was an invitation from the M.C.C. to make one of the team that would tour Australia during the ensuing winter. Presently, with a deep sigh, the young man rose from his chair and, linking his arm affectionately in that of his father, the two walked slowly to the library, followed by the sympathetic eyes of the old butler.

CHAPTER IV

SENT FOR TRIAL

The days went by: days of misery for Jack Armitage. He tried hard to face the future with equanimity, but do what he would he could not eradicate the feeling of approaching disaster that had taken possession of him. Sir John did his utmost to cheer him and to take his mind away from the anxiety that was consuming him, but with little success. Brought up in an atmosphere of happiness and peace, with never a worry to disturb the even tenor of his life, young Armitage was now face to face with something he did not understand, something which he was ill equipped to fight. If he had been brought up in surroundings where he had had to think and fend for himself, he would have been able to face this position from a different angle. As it was he was hardly able to credit it at all. It seemed far worse even than it was to his sensitive mind, with the result that he lived in a kind of numb horror. After twenty four years of ideal existence, he found himself called upon to tackle one of the grim realities of life, and a reality with which the great majority of experienced men of the world are never brought into contact.

Except for one game played for the local eleven against a neighbouring village, he had eschewed cricket altogether. Two or three invitations had come from the M.C.C., all of which he had refused. He hardly went out, he avoided callers, and when a party of his varsity friends had made a special visit to condole with him and express their belief in him, he left them to his father and slipped away from the house. The whole tragic business had affected his nerves to such an extent that he longed for the case to come up before the magistrates in order that he would know one way or the other what was in store for him.

The day before the postponed hearing, Mr. Renfrew arrived at Clifton Hall in a state of extreme perturbation. He was shown into Sir John's study at once and was hardly seated before he launched into an explanation of his agitation.

"The police have been extremely uncommunicative ever since the death of Dr. Whitelaw," he said, "with the result that my colleague and I hardly know where we stand. The inquest only served to make things even more difficult, for Mrs. Whitelaw was not asked any questions which would have caused her to show us whether we could rely on her or not. We knew that the doctors had agreed that death was due to a fracture of the skull caused by the deceased gentleman's head striking the plinth of the marble statue — "

"Yes, yes," said the General testily. "Go on !"

Renfrew looked momentarily offended. Like a good many lawyers he was extremely prosy and did not like to be interrupted. He took off his pince-nez and wiped them carefully before resuming. Without glasses his eyes looked more watery than ever. Sir John fumed with impatience and was about to burst out with another command to continue, when the lawyer cleared his throat and went on.

"The evidence of the doctors is not very terrifying," he announced. "The fact that Dr. Whitelaw's head struck the statue does not prove that Mr. Armitage is guilty of manslaughter. In ordinary circumstances our plea that he must have risen to his feet and then fallen again would have been quite adequate, with Mr. Armitage's assertion that he fell some distance from the statue. But such an assertion requires confirmation. I have tried to see Mrs. Whitelaw; I have even written to her without any success whatsoever, and now today I am informed of a *contretemps* which has come as a very serious misfortune."

"What is that ?" asked Sir John sharply.

"Mrs. Whitelaw has been sub-pœnaed as principal witness for the Crown."

He sat back to watch the effect of his words on the General, but if he expected a display of consternation he was doomed to disappointment; Sir John merely nodded his head.

"Yes," he observed; "I expected that, but we have nothing to fear

from her. She will merely tell the court what happened."

"But, Sir John," objected the lawyer, "how do we know that her statement will not be damaging to Mr. Armitage ?"

"Jack has told us what happened," said the General sternly. "He will tell it in court and her corroboration will help his case, not harm it."

"If she does corroborate it, of course," remarked the lawyer with a sigh; "but how do we know she will."

"She dare not lie," declared the old soldier. "I have seen her and I know."

"Oh, well, Sir John," said Renfrew rising, "that makes all the difference of course. At the same time I cannot help feeling worried — the opposition rather hint that they have a very damaging card up their sleeve in her evidence. May I see Mr. Armitage ? I wish to give him a few instructions about tomorrow."

Jack was sent for and schooled in the attitude he was to adopt in the courtroom and the way he was to answer certain questions, after which the lawyer went back to London looking less agitated but more mystified than when he had arrived.

The courtroom was crowded on the following morning when the Armitage case came up for hearing. The public took a tremendous interest in the affair and scores of people were unable to obtain admission. Jack's friends were there in force and they gave him reassuring smiles as he entered and took his place next to his lawyer. His case was the first on the list, much to his relief, and his spirits rose a little as he noticed the magistrate regarding him with the paternal air of a benevolent father.

The prosecution opened the proceedings without anything of a vituperative nature, and Jack gave a sigh of relief. He began to think that after all perhaps he had let his imagination run away with him. Sir John was sitting close behind and following every word with intense concentration. The first witnesses called were the two doctors; they agreed that Dr. Whitelaw's death had been caused by his head coming into violent contact with the pedestal of a marble statue, causing fracture of the skull and severe laceration, a fragment of the bone having penetrated to the brain itself. They declared that they had found the body lying with the head

reposing on one of the sharp corners of the plinth. The corner itself was covered with blood in which there were several hairs. The detective sergeant, who had arrested Jack Armitage, corroborated the doctors' statement of the position of the body, and described how he had gone to the prisoner's hotel to arrest him and had found him out, but after some time traced him to the theatre and had arrested him there. Jack's lawyer jumped up and cross-examined him.

"When you arrested the prisoner," he asked, "did he give you any reason for supposing that he knew anything about the death of Dr. Whitelaw ?"

"No, sir," replied the sergeant promptly. "He seemed stunned by the news."

"Thank you," said the lawyer, and sat down.

The detective was about to leave the box when the prosecutor stayed him.

"Just a moment, sergeant," he said. "When you had carried out the arrest and witnessed your prisoner's astonishment, did he say anything which would show that he realized that the doctor might have been — well, say, injured ?"

The sergeant hesitated.

"The only thing he said, sir," he remarked at last, "was, 'But he wasn't dead' !"

"Ah ! And that was in reply to your statement that he was arrested for causing the death of Dr. Whitelaw ?"

"Yes, sir."

The next witness called was Mrs. Whitelaw, and as she stepped into the box looking as pale as a ghost in her deep mourning, there was a craning of necks and a deep murmur in the courtroom. The clerk had to call for silence twice before she could be heard — she spoke in little more than a whisper. Sir John watched her with deep anxiety, little beads of perspiration gathering on his brow.

Before she had spoken a dozen words he knew that she had betrayed him. His whole being rose in revolt against the injustice of it all; he was compelled to dig his finger-nails deep into his flesh and to bite his lips to prevent himself from calling out and denouncing her. He strove to sit there; to listen to the lies he

felt she was pouring out, but it was more than he could stand. He felt that he was stifling, that he wanted air. Air, that was it — he must get outside, away from the fiend who was swearing his son's honour and freedom away. He must get somewhere where he could think — that is, if he ever could think again with his brain hammering as it was. Like a blind man he suddenly rose and groped his way out of the courtroom. He felt hands helping him — murmured his thanks. A kindly policeman took him by the arm and led him to a small, deserted room; then everything went blank.

He came to himself to find a doctor bending over him, with the anxious face of Renfrew hovering in the background.

"A slight stroke," said the former. "He'll be all right presently. He had better be taken home as soon as possible."

After a while he was left alone with Renfrew.

"She betrayed me, Renfrew," he whispered. "She has damned my son."

The lawyer nodded dumbly.

"What are we to do ? Tell me !" went on the General.

"The case is still going on," replied Renfrew, "but it is bound to be put back for trial now — there is no hope. We shall reserve our defence."

"Yes, yes," whispered Sir John. "That is the only thing to do. How long will it be before the trial ?"

"Three weeks. It will come up just before the vacation."

"Good ! There will be time enough to destroy her before then."

The lawyer looked startled.

"Good God, Sir John !" he ejaculated, using stronger language than he had ever done in his life before. "What are you talking about ?"

The General ignored his question.

"I must return to the court," he said.

Renfrew strove to restrain him, but he rose from his chair. Immediately he staggered back.

"Damn it !" he snapped almost viciously. "What has come over me ?"

"The best thing you can do is to go home, Sir John," said the

lawyer soothingly. "You can do no good here, and I and my colleague will see to everything."

Sir John was more acquiescent than he had expected.

"Yes, I daresay you're right," he said. "You'll get Jack out on bail again ?"

"I'll do my best, of course," was the reply, "but I doubt if it can be managed."

"It *must* be managed !" snapped the old soldier. "God ! what a fool I am to crock up like this ! Bring my boy home to me, Renfrew, as soon as you can. I'll be waiting for him."

The lawyer nodded and there was an unaccustomed lump in his throat as he helped the one-time famous soldier to his car which was waiting outside.

Back in the courtroom the case was nearly over. Mrs. Whitelaw's evidence, and that of her butler which followed, had left Jack Armitage's friends sitting silent and horrified. Jack himself was dumbfounded and sat stricken with shame and humiliation. The benevolent-looking magistrate was regarding him askance. Drama had been turned into tragedy, and every word that was spoken fell on the silent court-room as though pregnant with doom. The defence reserved evidence, and the magistrate, after a short address, delivered in a tone of regret, put back the case to come up for trial. Bail was applied for, but despite all the pleas which Renfrew and his colleague brought to bear, it was refused. Jack turned in a pathetic effort, as he left the court, to catch once more those glances of sympathy from his friends. He felt he needed them more at that moment than he had ever done, but most of his one-time companions had left; the others avoided his eyes and sheepishly wandered away. To young Armitage's sensitive heart their desertion was the last straw. His face became whiter than ever and he walked down to the cells feeling that something had dried up inside him. Renfrew obtained permission to hold a short interview with him before he was taken away to Wandsworth, where he was to stay until the trial.

"Where is my father ?" asked Jack.

"He was ill and I sent him home," was the reply. "I am afraid he will be rather upset when he knows that bail has been refused."

Jack nodded.

"Of course," he said simply; then, as the fact of his father's illness suddenly dawned upon his mind, he turned on his companion and clutched his arm with a grip that made the latter wince. "Is he — is he very ill ?" he demanded.

Renfrew patted him gently on the back.

"Nothing serious," he reassured him. "He'll be all right after a rest at home."

"Thank God for that," said Jack earnestly. "Take care of him, Renfrew !"

"You can rely upon me," was the sincere reply.

The young man squeezed the lawyer's arm affectionately.

"You're a good sort, Renfrew," he declared.

Sir John Armitage was bitterly disappointed when he heard that bail had been refused and he made strenuous but vain efforts to get the magistrate's order reversed. The stroke which he had suffered proved to be more serious than was at first supposed, at least his own physician took rather a grave view of it and ordered complete rest and quiet for a few days. The General, however, could think of nothing else but what he regarded as the betrayal of his son by Patricia Whitelaw. He had made up his mind to see her, confront her with her recreancy, and remind her of his threat. What the outcome of the interview would be he steadfastly refused to consider. He had told Jack nothing of his previous call at the house in Wimpole Street and of the stormy scene that had taken place there, and young Armitage, therefore, had no idea of the intense desire for vengeance that possessed his father. He first heard of the latter's determination to interview Patricia, when Sir John paid his first visit to his imprisoned son. Jack protested strongly — a protest in which he was earnestly joined by the doctor who had accompanied Sir John to Wandsworth.

"What's the good, Dad ?" he argued. "Nothing you can say will make that woman tell the truth. For some reason or other she has determined not only to protect herself but to condemn me, and the evidence of the butler supports her story throughout — I suppose she bribed him. At any rate my story will sound very thin against hers, and the death of Dr. Whitelaw and the

position of his body when found are other factors against me. Leave her alone, Dad! She'll only laugh at you and defy you. After all you have only my word to go on."

"I am going to see her," said Sir John obstinately; "and if she will not — "

He stopped and shrugged his shoulders. He proved obdurate, and Jack was at last forced to let him have his own way. He made one stipulation, however, and that was that the doctor should accompany the General to Wimpole Street.

When he left, there was a look on his face that puzzled Jack. It was an expression that he had never seen before and which vaguely alarmed him. He found himself weighing up all sorts of wild conjectures and picturing things that he dare not name even to himself. He shook himself angrily, and walked up and down his cell trying vainly to fix his mind on something else; but it was no good. Until he saw Sir John again he went through days and nights of acute mental agony, dreading what he might hear, yet all the time longing for news. It was with a feeling of intense relief that he once again confronted his father through the bars of the grim little room where prisoners were permitted to see their friends and legal advisers. A warder was present but very considerately kept out of hearing. Sir John was looking very stern and incensed.

"She has done us, Jack," he announced. "I arrived at Wimpole Street to discover that she had gone to the continent and left no address."

"It doesn't matter, does it?" asked Jack. "I don't think you could have done the slightest bit of good if you had found her in."

"Listen, my boy!" Sir John leaned forward impressively and spoke in a low voice. "I did not tell you, but I called on her on the day of the funeral and I warned her then that, if she did not tell the truth, I would hound her down until I made her suffer for every moment that she has made, or will make, you suffer. In fact I threatened to take her life."

"Good Heavens!" gasped Jack, looking at his father with horror.

"At first she defied me," went on the General in matter of fact tones, "but when I gave her a glimpse that I — er — meant what I said, her nerve broke, and I thought I had won. You know the

result. Now, Jack, that woman has gone away without trace to escape me. She will return on the day of the trial, go into the witness box, and swear your liberty away. I know what we are up against now, old chap, and we have to face the probability that you will be convicted and sentenced to imprisonment." His voice broke a little, but he pulled himself together, and went on. "I meant what I said when I threatened her and if I am spared, Jack, she will pay, and pay heavily. Unfortunately the stroke I had the other day has shown that — that I — er — have my limitations. If you are found guilty, I'm afraid I shan't survive the shock — "

"Don't, Dad !" cried Jack in agonized tones.

"We must face things, old man," said the old soldier quietly. "I am — you must ! If anything happens to me, I want you to promise that, when you are free again, you will follow out my intentions with regard to Patricia Whitelaw to the bitter end."

He looked questioningly at Jack who stood for some moments gazing before him with an unseeing stare, his face white with emotion, his lips drawn together in a thin line. After a while the young fellow faced the General.

"I promise, Dad," he said hoarsely, "but not on my own account. I will hunt her down and make her suffer hell itself and worse, if through her perfidy you are injured. I swear it !" he added in ringing tones.

Sir John smiled sadly.

"Just as you like, Jack," he said. "It will come to the same thing in the end. And now I have some news for you. Renfrew has briefed Sir Austin Walton to defend you."

"Well, he's certainly got the best man at the Bar," said Jack in tones of satisfaction.

"But that isn't all," went on the General. "Sir Stephen Marlow has broken down in health and is ordered abroad. Who do you think is to take his place as prosecutor ?"

"Walsh ?" queried Jack.

"No, my boy. Phillip Humphreys !"

"Good Lord !" exclaimed the young man. "My own cousin ! Why he is only thirty-two, isn't he ?"

"Yes," answered Sir John; "but he has been regarded as a coming man for some time now and his record is brilliant."

"Good old Phillip !" cried Jack enthusiastically. "His appointment has cheered me up no end. I am bound to get a fair deal now."

Sir John nodded.

"Yes," he said quietly. "Phillip will see to it that you get a sporting chance. Thank God for that !"

CHAPTER V

THE PRINCIPAL WITNESS FOR THE CROWN

THERE was a hum of chattering tongues in the Old Bailey. Packed to suffocation, the famous Court of Justice had an appearance of tense drama. Rows and rows of spectators were jammed together until they could hardly breathe. Barristers, reporters, and solicitors were seated at the tables in the well of the court. Above all sat the judge in his scarlet robes, apparently uninterested in the case he was trying and stifling every now and then, with a thin white hand, the yawns which seemed to be afflicting him. He was a small man with a pale, almost effeminate face, hooked nose, thin lips, and dark piercing eyes. Mr. Justice Allen had a reputation for severity second to none amongst His Majesty's judges. Almost opposite to him, seated in the dock with an official on either side of him, was the prisoner, Jack Armitage. The case for the Crown was in progress; already two or three minor witnesses had been disposed of and medical evidence given, but as yet the counsel for the defence had made no move. The name of Mrs. Whitelaw had just been called and this had caused the buzz of conversation. She stepped into the witness box, an apparently tragic figure with her white face and deep mourning. An usher called for silence and at once the hum of voices ceased.

The counsel for the Crown was speaking to a junior and, for a few seconds, there was an uncomfortable tension in the atmosphere. Jack Armitage watched the witness with pale cheeks and bloodless lips. He was on the rack and he knew that the crisis had arrived. Suddenly Phillip Humphreys straightened up and bowed courteously to the witness. He was remarkably like the prisoner in features and build, except perhaps that he was not

quite so broad-shouldered and had a slight stoop. His eyes also were of a palish blue and shaded by thick brown eyebrows, while his face was a red-brown rather than a bronze in colouring. He was more handsome than Jack perhaps, but he lacked the pleasant, open expression of his cousin and, at times, appeared almost saturnine. Sir John Armitage had not exaggerated when he had said that his nephew's record was brilliant. Since being called to the Bar he had gone from success to success until now, at the age of thirty-two, he had been deputed counsel for the Crown in the absence of Sir Stephen Marlow. His appointment had caused much critical comment and more jealousy, but he was the sort of man who rides roughshod over the opinions of others and he was not a whit affected by the remarks of his colleagues.

"Your name is Patricia Whitelaw, is it not ?" he inquired of the witness in a pleasant voice.

"Yes," she replied, almost in a whisper.

"You are the widow of Dr. Whitelaw ?"

"Yes."

"Will you please relate to the court the events that led up to your husband's tragic death ?"

The judge leaned forward and regarded her languidly.

"It was about twenty to seven," she said, "and I was reading in the drawing-room of my house, when — when Mr. Armitage came in to tell me about — about the cricket match. He and I have always been very friendly and I was glad to see him. My husband had gone away into the country and was not expected back until the next day. On this particular occasion I think Mr. Armitage was in rather an excitable state — he frightened me — "

"How ?" questioned the judge sharply.

She hesitated a moment.

"By making violent love to me," she said in a low voice that could scarcely be heard.

"H'm ! Go on !"

"I tried to get him to calm down, but he was insistent and put his arms round me. As he did so my — my husband walked in and saw what was happening."

This time she paused for quite a while, and it was only when the Crown counsel spoke to her that she went on.

"There was a terrible quarrel," she said. "My husband accused Mr. Armitage and me of having a love affair. He said that we had been watched by an agent of his — "

"Is this agent in court ?" asked the judge.

"He is the next witness, m'lud," replied Humphreys promptly. "Go on, Mrs. Whitelaw !"

"Mr. Armitage became violent and used very bad language. My husband ordered him out of the house, but suddenly he turned and hit David with tremendous force and knocked him down. He then laughed and walked out."

"When Dr. Whitelaw fell did his head strike anything ?" asked counsel.

"Yes; it came into violent contact with the base of a marble statue."

"What did you do ?"

"As soon as I saw that he was unconscious, and noticed the blood running from his head, I ran out to the butler and sent him for a doctor. Two came from next door and they told me that he was — dead."

"Quite so. Now tell me, Mrs. Whitelaw, did your husband attack, or make any movement to attack, the prisoner physically ?"

"Not the slightest."

"The blow was quite unprovoked ?"

"Yes."

"Can you remember Dr. Whitelaw's last words before the prisoner hit him ?"

"He merely told him that he was a hypocrite and ordered him to leave the house."

"I want to ask you a rather intimate question. Please don't hesitate to reply. Your husband accused you and the prisoner of being concerned in a love affair. Were you ?"

"No. Mr. Armitage and I were friendly and went about a great deal, but our friendship was entirely innocent."

"Thank you, Mrs. Whitelaw."

Humphreys sat down and for the first time Sir Austin Walton rose to cross-examine. He was a wizened little man with parchment-like skin and small beady eyes. He tapped the table in front of him with a bony forefinger.

"In your statement, madam," he said in his sharp, incisive voice, "you say that the prisoner came to see you. I suggest that that is not quite correct. I suggest that he came to see your husband and, finding him out, asked for you in the ordinary conventional manner."

"No," she replied; "he knew that my husband was away."

"How did he know ?"

"Because David had told him on a previous occasion that he would be away and, therefore, couldn't attend the cricket match."

"Are you sure of this ?"

"Quite sure."

"We'll let it pass for the time being. Again you state that you were on friendly terms with the prisoner and went about with him a good deal. I say that you were merely casual acquaintances and that you did not go out and about with him on one single occasion."

"That is not true," she protested. "I have often been about with him."

"Where ?"

"Various places," she replied vaguely.

"Specify them please !"

"Is that relevant, Sir Austin ?" asked the judge.

"It is very relevant, m'lud," returned the counsel for the defence drily.

The judge waved his hand and counsel waited for Patricia Whitelaw's reply. At last it came.

"We have dined together at Claridges and the Carlton," she said, "and have been to cinema shows and theatres, and to one or two dances."

"Ah ! You say you have been to dances ?"

"Yes."

"Is he a good dancer ?"

"Ye-es fairly good."

Suddenly he leaned forward, and his eyes seemed to be darting flames.

"How do you account for the fact," he snapped, "that at his varsity he was made fun of by his friends because he could not dance a step ?"

She drew back a little and a tremor seemed to run through her body.

"Anybody can dance a fox-trot," she murmured, "and whether he was supposed to be able to dance or not he always followed my steps quite well — we never danced anything but fox-trots."

A thin smile creased his lips and he bent down to consult some papers before him. A second later he jerked himself upright again.

"When Dr. Whitelaw was knocked down," he said sharply, "what was his remark to the prisoner ?"

"He — " she began, then flushed deeply. She had been almost caught. "He did not speak at all," she added hastily; "he was unconscious !"

"I suggest that he was merely stunned for a second or two, then said, 'you are not only a cur but a coward as well. What a surprise your father will have when he hears of the exploits of his son.' Am I not correct ?"

"No, you are not."

"Oh, my God !" exclaimed Sir John to Renfrew in a strangled voice. "She even admitted to me that David regained consciousness."

"S'sh !" said the lawyer soothingly.

"When your husband fell, what did you do ?" went on counsel.

"I went down on my knees by his side."

"Did you say anything ?"

"Yes. I said, 'What have you done ? Is he dead ?' "

"And what was the answer ?"

She was about to speak, but caught herself up. Sir Austin repeated his question.

"He didn't say anything," she declared. "He laughed and walked out."

"After you had gone down on your knees and spoken to him ?"

"Yes."

"Then there must have been a short period of time between the fall of Dr. Whitelaw and the prisoner's departure from the room. Yet in your statement a little while ago you gave the impression that he knocked down your husband, laughed, and left the room immediately."

"So he did. The time that it took me to go on my knees and say what I said was infinitesimal."

"It is my experience that a woman would stay some seconds in a state of immovable horror in a case like that before she thought of dropping to her knees; and that it would probably be several seconds more before she spoke. In fact, a minute or more would elapse."

"I am not like that."

A young barrister leaned over and whispered behind his hand to a friend.

"He is doing his utmost to get her rattled," he said.

"Yes; but she's proving a match for him," was the reply.

"Now, madam," continued Sir Austin briskly, "you were accused by your husband of being concerned in a love affair with the prisoner. That is so I believe ?"

"Yes; he did make such an accusation."

"And it is untrue ?"

"Absolutely."

"I suggest that there *was* a love affair, but that it was with another man, probably somewhat similar to the prisoner in looks, and that your husband made the mistake of taking the prisoner for this other man when he found you together. I further suggest that you had been philandering to such an extent that he had engaged a detective to watch you and your lover; that — "

"Stop !" she cried in a strangled voice.

Humphreys shot up like a jack-in-a-box.

"M'lud," he protested, "I submit that my learned friend is bringing in matters that have nothing whatever to do with this case. It it not denied that the prisoner knocked down the deceased gentleman. We are here to decide whether or not he committed manslaughter, not to determine if the witness' character is moral or otherwise."

He sat down. The judge passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"Strong words, Mr. Humphreys," he said, "but I agree with you. It does not seem to me that Sir Austin's remarks are quite in accord with the case. We are not judging an action for divorce."

"I submit that my observations are entirely justified, m'lud," said Sir Austin. "I desire to ask a question which I consider has an important bearing on this case."

"I object !" snapped Humphreys, darting up again.

"Objection allowed," said the judge. "Proceed !"

"Damn fool," muttered Sir Austin *sotto voce* as he bent down to consult his papers once again. When he looked up, there was a frown on his parchment-like forehead.

"You are quite sure, madam," he said, "that when your husband fell his head came into contact with the plinth of the statue ?"

"Yes," she replied.

"How far was he standing from the statue when he was hit ?"

She considered a moment, then:

"Quite three yards I should say," she declared.

A momentary gleam of triumph came into his eyes. He leaned forward impressively.

"Then will you tell the court," he said in a silky voice, "how it was possible for a man of your husband's height, which I believe was five feet eight, to fall and strike his head on the pedestal of a statue nine feet or more away ?"

"He staggered back before he fell," she replied without hesitation.

He bit his lips, and colleagues of his, sitting near by, hid smiles as they noticed his annoyance.

"I suggest that Dr. Whitelaw fell well away from the statue," he barked, "and that he was merely momentarily stunned. In other words, that he fell upon the carpet without serious effect when the prisoner hit him, and that it was another fall entirely which caused his death."

"That is untrue," she answered, without a flicker of her eyelids. "I have told you exactly what happened and I repeat, Mr. Armitage hit my husband with such force that he staggered back and crashed to the floor against the statue. He lost unconsciousness and died immediately."

"Thank you," he said in a surly tone and sat down.

Humphreys stood up.

"Did the prisoner notice that Dr. Whitelaw's head was bleeding, do you think ?" he asked.

"I am sure he did," she answered.

"Did he show no compunction for what he had done ?"

"None whatever. As I told you before, he just laughed and walked out of the room."

"Thank you, Mrs. Whitelaw. That will do."

A small, alert little man in a loud check suit, whose name was Cedric Smithers, was next called. He made his way to the witness-box and took the oath with the air of one who had gone through the ceremony on several occasions before. Mr. Justice Allen regarded him with a frown. Apparently he did not like the look of him.

"What is your name ?" asked Humphreys.

"Cedric Smithers," was the complacent reply.

"You are a private inquiry agent, are you not ?"

"I am, sir."

"What does that mean exactly ?" asked the judge.

"It is another name for a private detective, my lord," said the witness.

"I see. And what do you detect ?"

There was a subdued laugh from among the spectators. Smithers grew red and looked uncomfortable.

"I am chiefly engaged in matrimonial investigations, my lord," he said.

"Very well put," approved his lordship. "Please proceed, Mr. Humphreys !"

"Were you engaged by Dr. Whitelaw to watch Mrs. Whitelaw ?" asked the young prosecutor.

"Yes, sir."

"Why ?"

"Because he suspected that she was carrying on an affair with a gentleman friend."

"What do you mean by an affair ?" queried the judge.

"I — er — well, I hardly know how to explain, my lord. I mean to say that he suspected that she and her friend were lovers."

"I see."

"Did you ever see this gentleman friend ?" asked Humphreys.

"On several occasions."

"Was their attitude lover-like ?"

Sir Austin stood up.

"It seems to me, m'lud," he remarked, "that that question bears a striking resemblance to certain observations of mine which were ruled out of court."

"I have a definite purpose relative to the evidence," snapped back Humphreys.

"So had I," retorted Sir Austin drily, and sat down.

The judge waved his hand.

"The interruption was childish, Sir Austin," he said. "Answer the question, witness !"

Smithers ran his hand through his hair.

"Well, I can't say that their attitude was lover-like," he said. "She behaved all right, but he paid her a great deal of attention and always looked as though he was trying to make love to her."

"Would you recognize this gentleman again ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take a look at the prisoner !"

Smithers did so and stared boldly at Armitage who was watching him in trepidation.

"Well, is he the man ?" asked Humphreys.

"Yes, sir."

Jack sank back on to his hard bench with a gasp. Sir John, who had obtained a privileged seat in the well of the court, clutched the arm of his lawyer.

"Renfrew," he cried hoarsely, "that fellow's been got at. He's an infernal liar !"

He spoke louder than he had intended and the judge frowned down at him and snapped, "Silence in court !" Renfrew patted his arm gently.

Humphreys sat down and Sir Austin Walton rose in his jerky way.

"You have just told the court," he said, "that the prisoner is the man you have seen about with Mrs. Whitelaw. Are you quite certain that he is ?"

"Quite certain," said Smithers.

"If you saw him with half-a-dozen young men of his height, build, and colouring, would you be able to pick him out ?"

"Yes."

"How would you distinguish him ?"

"I never forget a face once I have seen it."

"Clever fellow," muttered the judge.

"On how many occasions do you imagine you have seen Mrs. Whitelaw and the prisoner together ?"

Smithers consulted a note-book which he extracted from his hip pocket.

"I have seen them together five times," he said after a pause.

"Have you the dates, places, and times in that book ?"

For the first time Smithers hesitated and looked uneasy.

"Yes, I have," he replied at last.

"Then kindly read them out !"

With a look of appeal at the judge, who was leaning back in his chair with his eyes half closed, the private detective slowly read out the list. Nobody but he himself knew that he made certain alterations as he read.

"Ah !" interrupted Sir Austin as the third item was being enumerated. "Read that again please; I find it interesting. Will you kindly pay particular attention to this item, m'lud ?"

The judge opened his eyes and nodded slowly.

"Go on !" said Sir Austin.

"On May the twenty-fourth," read Smithers, "Mrs. Whitelaw spent two and a half hours with Mr. X at the Bristol Hotel at Richmond from two-thirty P. M. until five."

"Why do you say Mr. X ?" queried the judge.

"Because I did not know his name, my lord."

"When did you first learn the name of Mrs. Whitelaw's admirer ?" asked Sir Austin quickly.

"The day after Dr. Whitelaw died."

"Isn't it rather a curious thing that a man, who calls himself a detective, took such an unconscionable time to find out the name of the man he was watching ?"

The inquiry agent fidgeted uncomfortably.

"He was so elusive, sir," he said vaguely.

Sir Austin stood for a moment with his hands in his pockets,

looking up at the ceiling as though he found something interesting there. Then he glanced back at the witness.

"Are you interested in cricket ?" he asked suddenly.

Smithers looked surprised, but smiled with a certain amount of relief. He felt on safer ground now.

"I am, very," he replied.

"Play it yourself, perhaps ?"

"I do when I get a chance, sir."

"Do you read the cricket news regularly ?"

"Every day," said the private detective with a frown. He was beginning to suspect danger again for he had suddenly remembered that the prisoner was a well-known cricketer.

"What paper do you read ?"

"The *Daily Bulletin* generally."

"Did you see that very excellent series of photographs entitled 'Our coming cricketers,' which the *Bulletin* published ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Among them was a first rate, full length photograph of Jack Armitage. Did you see it ?"

"Er — yes."

"Good ! Have you ever seen him play ?"

"Two or three times, sir."

"And do you mean to tell me," suddenly barked Sir Austin, "that you have studied the photograph of the prisoner, and have seen him play cricket two or three times, and yet you didn't recognize the man you had been carefully watching until the day after Dr. Whitelaw's death ? Yet you say he is the man."

He sat down and Smithers was left writhing in the witness-box. The young prosecuting attorney was on his feet at once.

"In that note-book of yours," he said, "you say you have the dates, places, and times of certain meetings between Mrs. Whitelaw and the prisoner. Now think carefully before you answer my question. Are those dates absolutely authentic ? Could you possibly have made a mistake, do you think ?"

"Well, such a thing is possible," said Smithers slowly. "I'm not infallible and it's very easy to forget a date and put down the wrong one."

"You mean to say that you might forget momentarily and write, say, nineteenth for eighteenth ?"

"Yes."

Humphreys sat down with a smile. Sir Austin immediately rose again.

"Taking the date I took particular note of," he said; "that is May the twenty-fourth; would you be prepared to swear that you had not made a mistake on that occasion ?"

"No," replied Smithers. "I wouldn't like to swear to it at all."

"Did you make that note on the day the meeting occurred ?"

"Yes."

"And you actually say you may have been mistaken in the date ?"

"I do."

"What's the date today ?" snapped the famous King's Counsel.

"The twenty-sixth !" was the prompt reply.

"Quite correct !" said Sir Austin drily, and he sat down again. "Bah !" he muttered to himself in disgust, "the fellow's the biggest liar in Christendom."

The case was adjourned until the next day.

CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND DAY OF THE TRIAL

Sir John Armitage arrived early in court next morning with Renfrew and made his way to the seat which he had occupied the previous day. He had aged tremendously of late, and there was little of his old fire and carriage left to denote the soldier. He looked like a man who was in chronic ill-health and, as a matter of fact, he had never really recovered from the stroke which had assailed him on the day his son had been sent for trial. But it was not that which was causing him to look so haggard and worn. He was consumed by anxiety and his heart was gradually breaking from an hourly increase of a feeling of hopeless despair. He had met his nephew, Phillip Humphreys, at his club on the previous evening, and there had endeavoured to fathom the young barrister's mind, but had failed to obtain the slightest inkling of his intentions. He had told him, with assumed joviality, that both he and Jack had been delighted at his appointment and felt that, at least, he would give his cricketing cousin a fair deal. To this Humphreys had made a non-committal reply. He remarked that he was unable to enter into a discussion of a case in which he was playing so important a rôle, and that Sir John would understand, of course, that he must do his duty.

There had been such a rush to obtain admission to the Old Bailey that the police had been compelled to issue tickets and to refuse entrance to those who were unable to produce them. It was not long after Sir John's arrival before the court was packed, and a ceaseless hum of conversation made the old soldier's head ache. He felt a deep resentment against those idlers who had nothing better to do than to come and listen to a sordid trial from a sense of perverted curiosity.

There was a buzz of expectancy as the door leading to the cells opened and young Armitage made his appearance between his two custodians. He was very pale and there were deep rings under his eyes denoting a sleepless night, but he walked with upright carriage and with his head thrown back defiantly. Sir John rose and was permitted to go forward and shake hands with his son. There was something very pathetic about the way these two smiled at each other. It was a moment fraught with emotion, and somewhere a woman sobbed.

"Good morning, Dad," said Jack with forced cheerfulness.

"Good morning, my boy," murmured the General. "I hope you were comfortable last night ?"

"Quite, Dad, thanks ! They've been jolly decent to me."

"It will soon be over now, Jack, and then we'll go away for a time and forget all about it. What do you say ?"

"Rather !"

And the two parted, keeping up their heroic pretence to each other, but feeling in their own hearts the very dregs of despair.

Sir Austin Walton and Phillip Humphreys entered together and the former had a short conversation with the prisoner, after which he went up to Sir John and shook hands with him.

"Never say die, Sir John," he said in his brisk voice. "We've still got a chance and I hate to see you with that expression on your face."

"He is my only son, Walton," replied the General in a low voice.

"Yes, yes. I — er — understand, of course."

The entrance of the judge put a stop to further conversation. Sir Fellowes Allen was not at his best apparently, for he glared round at the packed assembly as though he would like to send the lot to prison. The name of Charles Stannard was called, and Mrs. Whitelaw's severe-looking butler made his way to the witness box. A lot of his severity, however, had vanished and he looked as though he would have preferred to be anywhere than in a court of justice. He took the oath in a hesitating manner which was duly noted by Sir Austin Walton.

"Your name is Charles Stannard ?" commenced Humphreys.

"Yes, sir."

"You are employed as butler in Mrs. Whitelaw's household ?"

"I am, sir."

"How long have you held this situation ?"

"For nearly two years."

"Were you on duty on the day that Dr. Whitelaw died ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it you who admitted the prisoner into the house ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now tell me exactly what happened !"

"I went to the door, sir, and found young Mr. Armitage there. He asked to see Mrs. Whitelaw and I—"

"You are perfectly certain," asked counsel, "that he asked to see Mrs. Whitelaw and not Dr. Whitelaw ?"

"Quite certain, sir."

Sir John clutched Renfrew's arm feverishly.

"My God, Renfrew," he groaned, "there's a regular conspiracy against my boy."

"It looks like it," said the lawyer sadly. But even he was beginning to doubt young Armitage's story a little now.

"Go on !" prompted Humphreys to the witness.

"I told Mr. Armitage, sir, that I didn't think madam was receiving," continued the butler, "but that I would inquire. I went to her and she told me that she would see Mr. Armitage, so I showed him into the drawing-room."

"And then what happened ?"

"They were there together for about twenty minutes, I should say, when Dr. Whitelaw came in."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about him ?"

"Yes, sir. He seemed in a state of anger, and his clothes were unkempt-like, sir, which was most unusual for him."

"What did he do ?"

"He told me to take his bag to the surgery, and went straight into the drawing-room."

"Did you hear anything of the conversation that took place ?"

"No, sir, but after a while I heard Mr. Armitage's voice raised as if he was in a temper."

"What did he say ?"

"I couldn't hear anything very distinctly, but it seemed to me that he was using bad language."

"What do you mean exactly by bad language ?" queried the judge.

"He was calling the doctor things what one gentleman don't usually call another, my lord."

"H'm !" muttered the judge. "Can you remember any of these — er — things ?"

The butler hesitated and looked uneasily at the prisoner who was sitting watching him with an expression of disgust on his face.

"Go on !" snapped his lordship angrily. "I asked you a question."

Stannard pulled himself together.

"I heard him call the doctor a — a bloody liar, my lord," he said.

There was an audible gasp from the rows of spectators. Sir John forgot where he was, forgot everything, but that his son had been insulted. He sprang to his feet.

"Jack Armitage would never use such language to a friend," he shouted.

Renfrew made a frantic clutch at his arm. The judge shot a glance of amazed anger at him.

"Who are you, sir ?" he snapped.

"You know as well as I do," replied the incensed General, "that I am Sir John Armitage and the father of the prisoner in the dock."

"Oh, indeed !" purred Mr. Justice Allen. "Well, may I remind you that this is a court of justice ? I will give instructions for your removal if you make the slightest sign of interrupting again."

Sir John sat down feeling deeply humiliated.

"Gad !" he muttered to himself. "I would like to have that cockerel on the parade ground for ten minutes."

"Will you proceed, Mr. Humphreys !" said the judge.

"What happened after you heard the prisoner using bad language ?" asked the counsel for the prosecution.

"There was a sudden thud, and I heard madam cry out in a frightened voice, 'what have you done ?' Almost immediately Mr. Armitage came out of the room. He took his hat and went away."

"Was he laughing ?"

"Not exactly, sir. He had a sort of sneer on his face."

"I see. Tell me: when he first arrived did he look as though he were intoxicated ?"

"No; I can't say he did, sir. He looked as though he was excited about something, that was all."

"What did you do after he had left ?"

"Nothing, sir. I didn't know what to do, so I stood where I was until Mrs. Whitelaw ran out, and told me to fetch a doctor quick."

"Did she look very upset ?"

"Terribly, sir. She was as white as death and crying like a baby."

"How long did it take you to get the doctors ?"

"Not more than two or three minutes. I went to the house next door where Dr. Padden lives, and found him with another medical gentleman. They came at once."

"You entered the drawing-room with them, did you not ?"

"Yes, sir."

"How was the body of your master lying ?"

"Flat on his back, sir, with the head resting on the pedestal of the statue."

"What did you do after that ?"

"Dr. Padden sent me to ring up the police, sir."

"Is there any other incident you can remember connected with that evening, which might have some bearing on this case ?"

"No, sir."

As Humphreys sat down, Sir Austin Walton walked right up to the witness-box and stood within a couple of feet of the witness. Stannard looked uncomfortable and bit his under lip.

"In a court of law," said Sir Austin in a conversational tone, "a witness is put on oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth — you know that, don't you ?"

The butler nodded dumbly.

"Good !" went on counsel. "If he does not tell the truth, he is likely to find himself in the dock instead of the witness-box, with a charge of perjury hanging over his head — "

Humphreys sprang to his feet angrily.

"M'lud," he cried. "I object ! My learned friend is endeavouring to intimidate the witness."

Sir Austin turned and glanced at the counsel for the prosecution, with a look of mild surprise on his face.

"Would you be good enough to inform me," he asked blandly, "in what way I am intimidating the witness ?"

"You are suggesting that he has committed, or is inclined to commit, perjury."

"I am doing nothing of the sort. I was merely explaining to him the obligations he has undertaken and the consequences if those obligations are forgotten, or ignored."

"I submit that your remarks were wholly unnecessary. The witness has been put upon his oath and it is for the court to decide whether or not he has told the truth."

"I quite agree with you," said Sir Austin suavely. "I am afraid my learned friend has misunderstood me, m'lud," he remarked to the judge, "since he attributes to my remarks a meaning that is not there, and endeavours to accuse me of intimidation."

"I say that your observations were calculated to intimidate the witness," declared Humphreys, "in the sense of frightening, cowing, or deterring him from giving his evidence to the best of his ability, and thus helping this court."

"It is kind of you to explain the meaning of the word, 'intimidation,' " remarked Sir Austin pleasantly.

"Enough of this verbiage," snapped Mr. Justice Allen irritably. "I see no objection to Sir Austin's remarks whatsoever. Please continue !"

Humphreys sat down with a scowl, and the famous King's Counsel turned back to the witness.

"I hope my learned friend's remarks have not upset you," he observed. "An interruption like that is certainly calculated to frighten, if not intimidate you."

There was a general titter, and Humphreys frowned savagely.

"However, let us get on !" continued Sir Austin. "You are perfectly certain, you say, that the prisoner asked for Mrs. Whitelaw and not Dr. Whitelaw, on the day he called at Wimpole Street ?"

"Yes, sir."

"When you went to announce his arrival to Mrs. Whitelaw, did she seem pleased ?"

"Not particularly, sir. She looked neither one thing nor the other, and told me to let him in just as she would any caller."

"Was she alone ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where were you while he was in the drawing-room with her ?"

"Outside in the hall, sir."

"Could you hear anything that was going on ?"

"No, sir."

"You didn't listen at the keyhole for instance ?"

"Certainly not, sir," replied the butler in an indignant voice. "I never do a thing like that."

"What a model servant !" murmured the judge.

"You say that Dr. Whitelaw came home in a state of anger," continued Sir Austin, "yet it was not his voice that was raised angrily, but the prisoner's. Haven't you made a mistake ? You meant to say that the doctor was shouting angrily, did you not ?"

"No, sir. It was Mr. Armitage."

"And you are certain that he was using bad language ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Including the example you gave to the court a few minutes ago ?"

"Please don't ask him to repeat it !" murmured the judge.

"Yes, sir," replied the butler to Sir Austin's question.

"I suggest that you did not hear the prisoner shouting at all, that, if you heard anything, it was Dr. Whitelaw's voice !"

"You are wrong, sir. I tell you it was Mr. Armitage I heard."

"When you heard the thud of something falling, did Mrs. Whitelaw cry out immediately ?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how long was it after the fall that the prisoner came out of the room ?"

"Almost at once — only a few seconds could have passed."

"Are you perfectly certain of that ?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suggest that quite a minute elapsed."

"You are quite wrong."

Sir Austin frowned. He paced up and down in front of the witness for a few moments then, swinging round sharply, he confronted Stannard again.

"Did the prisoner seem to you to be in a hurry to get away ?" he asked.

"Yes; he was rather."

"Why didn't you go into the room as soon as you heard the fall and noticed the hurried exit of Armitage from the house ?"

"I am only a servant," was the reply delivered in a somewhat servile voice, "I had no right to enter without being called."

"I understand that nearly five minutes elapsed between the time that the prisoner left and Mrs. Whitelaw called you ? Is that so ?"

The butler seemed to be unprepared for this question. He started to speak, hesitated, then began to flounder hopelessly.

"I — well, you see, sir — that's to say," he stammered. "As — as a matter of fact I didn't take any note of the time," he ended desperately.

"I don't suppose you did," said Sir Austin calmly. "Still you must have had some idea — what do you think ?"

"Well, I should imagine," said Stannard slowly, "that it was quite three or four minutes after he went before madam came to me."

"Not less than three minutes at all events ?"

"Oh, no, sir."

Sir Austin stuck his hands in his pockets and gazed up at the ceiling as though searching for inspiration. Then he looked back at the butler who was apparently longing for his ordeal to end, to judge from the expression on his face.

"Three minutes is a long time," observed counsel, "if one stands still and watches the large hand of a clock moving over that space. Have you ever boiled an egg ?"

"Er — yes, sir," replied the witness in a tone of surprise.

"Well, most people like an egg boiled for from three to three and a half minutes. Hasn't it struck you what a long time that egg is before it is ready ?"

"Yes, I suppose it has."

"Quite a lot of things could happen in that time, couldn't they ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, what do you think was happening in the drawing-room during the three minutes or more that elapsed, after the prisoner left the house, until you were sent for a doctor ?"

"I suppose madam was attending to Dr. Whitelaw."

"Considering that he was so badly injured, doesn't it strike you as strange that she should wait for so long before calling in medical aid ?"

"It is not my business."

"It is your business to answer my question," snapped Sir Austin.

"I did not think about the matter at all," muttered Stannard in sulky tones.

"During those three minutes or so that passed, did you hear another sound like that of a heavy body falling ?"

"No, sir. Everything was quiet after Mr. Armitage left."

"You are sure of that ?"

"Absolutely certain, sir."

"Who was it made the statement to the police which brought about the arrest of the prisoner ?"

"It was Mrs. Whitelaw."

"Did the prisoner leave the door open behind him when he left the drawing-room ?"

Stannard hesitated.

"I'm not sure," he said after a moment or two. "I think he must have shut it, because I feel certain that Mrs. Whitelaw opened it when she came out to me."

"Thank you," said Sir Austin and returned to his seat.

There were two other witnesses, one a footman in the deceased doctor's household, and the other the taxi-driver who had driven Armitage to Wimpole Street and from thence to Northumberland Avenue, but their evidence was merely formal, and Sir Austin did not cross-examine them.

As the taxi-driver stepped down from the witness-box, Humphreys turned and bowed to the judge.

"That is the case for the Crown, m'lud," he said.

The counsel for the defence rose to his feet and bowed in his turn to his lordship.

"M'lud," he said briskly, "and members of the jury, you have listened to the evidence which has been put before you by my learned friend for the Crown. I am not going to deny that the prisoner knocked down Dr. Whitelaw, but I am going to show you that he was goaded into his action by an altogether unjustifiable insult, which no young man with his high ideals of honour, and with his high spirits, could tolerate for one moment. I am also going to show you that the blow which laid the eminent specialist low did no more harm than to stun him for a moment, and possibly make him realize that he had deserved the punishment which had been meted out to him. I am not saying that it is right for one man to knock down another, especially if the victim of his blow is a great deal his senior, but I do say that there is an entire excuse for such an action when that man has been goaded beyond endurance by insults and indignities against his manhood. The prisoner is only twenty-four, m'lud, an age when one is apt to be hot-headed and impulsive; an age, too, when one's ideals are probably far more the very essence of one's existence than when one begins to approach the sere and sad path of age, and discover that one's most cherished beliefs are but ashes in one's mouth.

"All his life the prisoner has lived an exemplary existence. At school he was honoured as very few boys are; at his varsity he covered himself with glory, morally, physically, and intellectually. He is the honoured scion of an honoured family, and bids fair to carry on the great traditions of his forbears as brilliantly, and as gloriously, as his own illustrious father.

"Gentlemen, the tragic little tale, which has been unfolded in this court, actually rests only between three persons. When Dr. Whitelaw was knocked down, there were only two other people present in that room, one of them was the doctor's wife and the other was, of course, the prisoner. You have heard the lady's story — I ask you now to give your sympathetic attention to what the prisoner has to say, and I entreat you to judge as you yourselves would be judged, by listening intently without bias to what I assure you will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of the incidents that took place in Dr. Whitelaw's drawing-room while the prisoner was present in that fatal apartment."

The judge's thin lips curled in a wintry smile as Sir Austin was

finishing his address. He knew the famous barrister probably better than others knew him, and although there was no particular friendship between the two, they realized each other's good points and appreciated them. Sir Austin was never so good as when he had to fight a thin cause; that was the time when the prosecution knew him to be most dangerous. Mr. Justice Allen quite recognized this fact and he began to feel a greater interest in the case than he had hitherto done. He wondered what kind of showing Humphreys would make at the finale.

Sir John Armitage managed to scribble a few lines on a piece of paper which was handed up to Jack through the instrumentality of Renfrew. The young prisoner read the message and afterwards put the paper carefully away in a pocket.

Don't spare her, Jack! [it read] *She has lied and lied to damn you, and now she has forfeited every right to consideration because of her womanhood. Drag her name in the mud, which is the only element which she is fit for! Good luck, my boy!*

"I call the prisoner, m'lud," said Sir Austin.

Jack squared his shoulders, left the dock, and crossed to the witness-box with a firm tread. He felt that his crucial moment had arrived and he was glad that at last his long inactivity was over, at least for a little while. He took the oath in a clear ringing voice, and there were many there who, when they heard him, declared that there was nothing, and probably never could be anything, depraved in his character.

"Your name is John Armitage, is it not?" asked Walton.

"Yes, sir."

"And your age?"

"Twenty-four."

"You are a well-known cricketer?"

"Well, I play first-class cricket, sir."

"You played in the test trial match at Lords, I believe?"

"I did."

"And you achieved a triumph?"

Jack flushed a little.

"I was fairly successful, sir," he replied.

"When the match was over, what did you do ?"

"I was returning to my hotel, when it suddenly occurred to me to pay a short visit to Dr. Whitelaw. He had always been very decent to me and I thought he would — would like to hear that I — hadn't done so badly in the trial match."

"Did you not know that he was out of town ?"

"No, sir; otherwise I would not have gone to Wimpole Street."

"Would you not have made a point of calling on Mrs. Whitelaw ?"

"No; it wouldn't have occurred to me to do so."

"Why not ?"

"She and I were never more than acquaintances."

The judge leaned over his desk.

"Have you been listening to the evidence for the Crown ?" he asked.

"I have, my lord."

"During that evidence it was stated on more than one occasion that you and she were very friendly. Do you still affirm that you were never more than acquaintances ?"

"Yes, my lord."

The judge leaned back and gently patted his mouth with a handkerchief.

"When you arrived at the house," questioned Sir Austin, "whom did you ask for ?"

"Dr. Whitelaw."

"Not Mrs. Whitelaw ?"

"No."

"And what did you do when you were told he was away ?"

"I asked for Mrs. Whitelaw."

"And you were shown in to her ?"

"The butler told me that she was not receiving, but that he would inquire if she would see me. He was away for nearly ten minutes, then came back and took me to her."

"Was she glad to see you ?"

"Not particularly, I think. In fact she gave me the impression that she wasn't at all pleased at my arrival."

"What made you think that ?" asked the judge, leaning forward again.

"She seemed agitated, my lord."

"In what way ?"

"I can't exactly describe it; it was as though she felt that I had come at an inopportune moment."

"That sounds like the fancy of a man who was looking for encouragement," remarked his lordship caustically.

"Can you think of any reason why your visit should have been inopportune ?" asked Sir Austin.

Jack hesitated. Was he to blurt out his impressions ? She had not spared him, had she ? In fact she had gone out of her way to tell the most damnable lies about him. He did not like dragging a woman's name through the mud, of course, and in ordinary circumstances such a thing would be unthinkable. But his father had said that she had forfeited all right to consideration and had advised him to tell everything. Well, he would, if only for the pater's satisfaction. He looked up and met Sir Austin's eye.

"I had a feeling," he said simply, "that there was somebody else in the room besides Mrs. Whitelaw and me !"

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH THE PRISONER IS CROSS-EXAMINED

THERE was a profound sensation in Court and Sir Austin Walton smiled with satisfaction. The judge tapped his white teeth with the end of a penholder, and the pressmen wrote as though their lives depended on it. Phillip Humphreys half rose in his chair as though he were about to interfere, but sank back with a shrug of his shoulders and spoke rapidly to a junior. The jury whispered together and some of them made notes.

"What gave you that feeling, do you think ?" asked Sir Austin.

"While we were speaking she was not listening to me, and every now and then glanced round in a half startled fashion. I made an observation which she interpreted to mean that my coming had troubled her. She told me not to be foolish, and laughed at the idea. I told her that I had not been thinking of myself, and my remark seemed to throw her into confusion. She asked me what I meant."

Sir Austin nodded grimly.

"Supposing there was another person in that room," he asked, "was there any secluded place, where he or she could have been hidden ?"

"Oh, yes. There is an alcove concealed by a curtain."

"That would be directly behind the marble statue, would it not ?"

"Yes, sir." Jack could hardly repress a shudder at mention of the statue.

"How long were you in the room before Dr. Whitelaw came back ?"

"Not more than ten minutes."

"And was Mrs. Whitelaw in a state of agitation all that time ?"

"More or less."

"Is there only one door in the room ?"

"No; there are two others besides the entrance from the hall."

Mr. Justice Allen appeared to be taking a greater interest in the trial than at any other period. He was following every word with the closest attention, and had even ceased to yawn.

"When Dr. Whitelaw arrived what did Mrs. Whitelaw do ?" asked counsel.

"I was just about to go, but when she heard his voice she begged me to stay. She seemed so upset that I thought she was going to be ill and, when she staggered, I put my arm round her waist to prevent her from falling."

"And I suppose the doctor came in and caught you in that attitude ?"

Jack nodded.

"What did he do ?"

"He seemed amazed to see me there and said that of all the men he knew, I was one of the few about whose integrity he had felt certain. Of course I didn't understand what he meant and told him so. That appeared to enrage him, and he made certain very terrible charges against me."

"He really suspected, therefore, that you and his wife were lovers ?"

"Not until he found me in the room with her. He told me that he had employed an agent to watch her, and that the man had reported that she spent a lot of her time in the company of a tall, clean-shaven man, but that he had never associated me with that description until he discovered me there."

"Why had he come back at the identical moment that you and she were together ?" asked the judge sharply.

"He had received a telegram from the private detective asking him to return, my lord."

"What for ?"

"Because the man had certain information to give him."

"What was that information ?" persisted his lordship.

"Need I answer that question, my lord ?" asked the prisoner.

Humphreys jumped up.

"We appear to be wandering into irrelevancy again, m'lud," he began.

"Sit down !" snapped the judge. "The evidence is quite in accord with the case."

Humphreys sat down, a dull red suffusing his face.

"I desire an answer to my question," said Mr. Justice Allen with asperity.

Young Armitage shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, my lord," he replied. "Dr. Whitelaw said that he had received proof that Mrs. Whitelaw and I, as representing the man, had spent two weekends together under the names of Mr. and Mrs. Webster."

"Ah !" exclaimed the judge, and sat back in his seat as though he had derived a great deal of personal satisfaction from the disclosure.

"What did you do when Dr. Whitelaw made that statement ?" asked Sir Austin.

"I lost my temper, and said that it was a damnable lie."

"You are sure of that ? You did not call him — " here Sir Austin coughed — "a bloody liar ?"

"Certainly not !"

"What happened after that ?"

Again Jack hesitated.

"Go on !" prompted counsel.

"He said that Mrs. Whitelaw and I were paramours," replied the young prisoner in a low voice.

"Ah !" remarked the judge. "That annoyed you I suppose ?".

"It made me lose control of myself, my lord," said Jack fiercely. "I told him to take back the word, or — or I would ram it down his throat."

"And did he ?"

"No, he did not !" Jack's eyes flashed at the recollection. "He told me to go and — and take — my mistress with me."

"A very pretty scene indeed," murmured his lordship.

There was dead silence in court for a moment or two, then:

"After that you knocked him down, I suppose ?" asked Sir Austin.

"I did, sir. I forgot our friendship and — and everything else. It stunned him a little, but he soon recovered."

"You are absolutely certain of that ?"

"Positive, sir."

"What was Mrs. Whitelaw doing all this time ?"

"I hardly know. When he fell she gave a sort of stiffled scream, and went down on her knees by the doctor's side."

"Did she say anything ?"

"Yes, she asked me what I had done, and if I had killed him."

"She asked you if you had killed him, did she ?" queried the judge.

"Well, my lord, she said, 'Is he dead ?' Then she told me to go."

"Did you go at once ?" asked Sir Austin.

"No, sir. I was about to go when he recovered."

"Did he speak to you ?"

"Yes. He said that I was not only a cur, but a coward and that my father would have a surprise when he heard of my exploits."

"Did you go then ?"

"No; I apologized for knocking him down."

"What did he say to that ?"

"He ordered me out of the house, and I went."

"Ah ! When you left him was he still lying on the floor ?"

"He had half risen."

"Had he fallen anywhere near the marble statue ?"

"No, sir. He must have been three or four feet from it."

Sir Austin consulted some papers.

"Have you ever," he asked, "been in love, made love to, or in any way shown affection for Mrs. Whitelaw ?"

"Never."

"Have you ever taken her out to dinner, tea, or to any cinema or theatre shows ?"

"Never. She has dined with my father and me, of course."

"By herself ?"

"Her husband was always with her."

"You think that Dr. Whitelaw mistook you for some other man, who was her lover ?"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"Thank you," said Sir Austin, and he sat down with an air of satisfaction.

The honest and clear way in which Jack Armitage had given his evidence had created a deep impression, and there were many among the spectators who felt that he stood a good chance of acquittal.

Humphreys rose and regarded the prisoner intently for a moment. Here was quite a piquant situation — cousin versus cousin.

"He's in an uncomfortable position," said one barrister to another. "I shouldn't like to have to cross-examine a relative."

"Oh, he'll let him off lightly," said the other.

"You state," began Humphreys, "that you have never taken Mrs. Whitelaw out to dinner, tea, or to any cinema or theatre shows. Is that so ?"

"Yes."

"You are certain that there has not been even one episode of that nature ?"

"Quite certain."

"Is it not a fact that you met her in Fiametti's early in April last, and had tea with her ?"

Armitage went white. He had not thought of that occasion. It had been an accidental encounter, of course, but — suddenly a deep feeling of resentment rose in him. This was his cousin, from whom he had a right to expect some sort of consideration, and he was using a relative's knowledge against him.

"You are quite right," he said. "I had forgotten. It was a chance meeting and — "

"I am not asking you whether it was by chance or not," interrupted Humphreys sharply. "It is a fact?"

"Yes," answered poor Jack, feeling that his memory had caused him to make an awful blunder.

"Do you dance ?"

"I have never danced."

"Never ?"

"I have never been to a proper ball, if that is what you mean."

"I said nothing about balls. I asked you if you danced."

"I have gone round in those little affairs in college, of course, but I made such an ass of myself that I even gave that up."

"Then you have danced ?"

"In that way — yes. That is, if you can call that dancing."

"As a batsman in cricket, you are supposed to be remarkably quick on your feet, are you not ?"

"I suppose I am fairly quick."

"Do you think it possible for a man to be as light on his feet as you, and yet be unable to dance ?"

"I don't know. I can't anyway."

"Don't you think it seems rather inconceivable when present-day dances, like the fox-trot for instance, are so simple ?"

"Perhaps it does. I dislike dancing."

"Ah ! You dislike it ! Many men do, but they can still dance."

Jack Armitage was getting flustered. He had to grip on to the ledge of the box to keep control of himself.

"When you knocked down Dr. Whitelaw, you state that Mrs. Whitelaw asked you if he were dead. Is that so ?"

"Yes."

"Why should she ask a question like that ? A man doesn't die from an ordinary blow."

"I suppose she was — rather hysterical."

"But if he were simply lying on a soft carpet without any sign of serious injury, even an hysterical woman could hardly think he were dead, could she ?"

"I don't know. I don't understand women."

"You state that he half rose from the floor after you had apologized to him. If you were so sorry for having hit him, why did you not help him up ?"

"I was too upset to think of it."

"You have made a statement that you suspected the presence of a third person whilst you were in the drawing-room with Mrs. Whitelaw. It is a serious suggestion to make; you realize that ?"

"Certainly ! But it was just a feeling I had. I didn't say that there was someone there actually."

"Ah ! You are trying to wriggle out of it, are you ?"

Jack's face turned a dull red, and he bit his lip.

"I am trying to do nothing of the sort," he protested. "I stick to

my statement: I *did* feel there was another person in the room."

"A man I suppose ?"

"I don't know. I wasn't interested enough to think about it."

"Well, I suppose you would hardly imagine that a woman would have been hidden there ?"

"Why not ?" asked Jack promptly. "I had never been brought into contact with anything in the shape of a liaison before, and anyhow I would never have thought of such a thing in connection with Mrs. Whitelaw."

"Because of your own admiration and love for her, I suppose ?"

Jack looked at his cousin with his eyebrows raised questioningly.

"My admiration and love for her ?" he asked. "I don't understand your meaning. I had no admiration or love for Mrs. Whitelaw."

"Please don't quibble !" said Humphreys sharply. "You have just said that you would never have thought of connecting Mrs. Whitelaw with such a thing as a liaison. Unless you had unbounded faith in her, and that faith engendered by your own feelings, why should you not connect her in particular with one of the frailties of mankind ?"

"Don't be an ass !" cried Jack hotly, quite forgetting for a moment where he was. "I— "

"Order ! Order !" snapped the judge. "I cannot have you using expressions like that in court."

"I beg pardon, my lord," apologized the prisoner, then turning to Humphreys, "I am not in the habit of connecting any woman with that sort of thing," he said sternly, "more especially the wife of my oldest friend. I am content to leave thoughts of that description to men with bestial minds."

The young barrister frowned angrily, and there was an audible titter from the body of the court, subdued immediately by the portentous frown of the judge.

"And you actually want the court to believe," went on Humphreys sarcastically, "that you felt there was another person present in that room, and in your wonderful and exemplary innocence were quite prepared to take it for granted that that person might be a woman ?"

"I certainly do. As I have already stated, I never stopped to think of the sex of the hidden person."

"Why should a woman hide ?" snapped Humphreys.

"How do I know ? Why should a man for that matter ?"

This time his lordship himself laughed, and the court joined in heartily.

"Look here !" said Humphreys, and he was beginning to look thoroughly angry. "You have told a story about suspecting the presence of a third person in the room. Now what possible object could you have in telling such a tale unless it was with a view to making the court think that you were the innocent victim of Dr. Whitelaw's accusations ? Therefore, the supposedly hidden person could be no other than a man."

"I did not tell the court my suspicions on that account at all," replied Jack. "It was to explain why I thought Mrs. Whitelaw was agitated."

"If you had gone into that room, and found a man with Mrs. Whitelaw, would you have been surprised and suspicious ?"

"No; of course not. Why should I be ?"

"Then why would it have been necessary for a man, or a woman, to have hidden simply because you had called ?"

The prisoner was silent.

"Ah !" said Humphreys with a thin smile. "That is something else you didn't bother to think about I suppose. Let us imagine, just for the sake of argument, that there was a man there whom Mrs. Whitelaw did not wish you to see. Don't you think that she would have sent a message to you by her butler that she was unable to receive you ?"

"I don't know."

"Why this pretence of innocence and callow youth ?" demanded the counsel for the prosecution. "It is my experience that varsity men are as wise of the ways of the world as most middle-aged men who have never experienced the social life of a great university. If Mrs. Whitelaw had not wanted to see you, she would have sent a message to say she was engaged, or had a headache, or was going through her household accounts, and you know it. A pretence of simplicity and ignorance will not help you in a court of law."

This attack, delivered as it was with unnecessary vehemence,

caused a profound stir in court. Sir Austin Walton's junior spoke to him earnestly, but the King's Counsel merely shrugged his shoulders. Sir John rose to his feet wrathfully, but was immediately pulled down by the anxious Renfrew.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the barrister, who had previously spoken. "I made a big error when I thought Humphreys would let the prisoner off lightly."

"To return to the gentleman," resumed counsel smoothly, "whom we are supposing to be hidden behind the curtain in the alcove. You suggest, I presume, that, when you had knocked down Dr. Whitelaw, and had left the room, he came out from his hiding-place and, catching hold of the doctor, dashed his head against the pedestal of the statute and killed him ?"

"I am suggesting nothing of the sort," returned Armitage indignantly.

"Then how do you suppose that the doctor died, if your blow did not cause him to fall with his head against the pedestal ?"

"I don't know. I only know that I did not kill him."

Humphreys wore an air of mock reflection.

"You don't suppose," he said, "that the doctor was in such a rage when you had gone that he dashed his own head against the statue, or that Mrs. Whitelaw dragged him across to it, and hit his head on it until he was dead, do you ?"

"Oh, for God's sake stop baiting me !" groaned Jack, whose head was almost splitting with the ordeal through which he was going.

"I regret that you should imagine that I am baiting you, as you call it. Don't you think that it is more likely your own conscience pricking you ? You have endeavoured to drag a woman's name through slime in a frantic effort to help yourself; a woman who was always friendly to you, and apparently fond of you in a sisterly sort of way. I have one more question to ask you, and then I am done. You state that you and she were merely casual acquaintances, yet she had been married to Dr. Whitelaw for nearly two years, and Dr. Whitelaw and your father had always been such firm friends that they spent all their available time together. It is conceivable that on the majority of occasions Mrs. Whitelaw was present. She would, therefore, quite automatically

have become pretty intimate with you. How, therefore, could you possibly call your acquaintance casual ?"

"I did not see much of her. I have been away at college most of the time since Dr. Whitelaw married her."

"Did she never visit you at college ?" asked the judge.

"Yes, my lord; she came down on a few occasions with my father and the doctor."

"Were you present at the wedding ?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then you have actually known her for two years or more ?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Did you know her before the wedding ?" asked Humphreys.

"No."

"Thank you."

The counsel for the prosecution sat down, and Jack left the witness-box and returned to the dock, feeling as though his soul had been seared with red-hot irons.

Sir Austin called three or four gentlemen who knew the prisoner well, and who vouched for his integrity. They all agreed that he had a splendid character; that in their experience he had never done anything discreditable, and was a model to others. They also stated that he was very shy of women, and that it was unthinkable that he would ever have a love affair with a married woman. Humphreys forebore to cross-examine them.

The last witness called was a gentleman named Oliver. He was a well-known cricketer, and a friend of Sir Austin's. After the usual formalities:

"You have played cricket with the prisoner I believe ?" asked counsel.

"I have," was the reply.

"On how many occasions, do you think ?"

"Only twice this year."

"Do you remember the dates and places ?"

"Yes; the first time was in Folkestone on the ninth and tenth of May, and the second time was at a country house party near Leominster on the twenty-fourth."

"Are you sure of that date ?" asked the judge.

"Perfectly, my lord."

"I also played in that match, m'lud," interposed Sir Austin, "and I remember the date."

"You, Sir Austin !" exclaimed the judge. "Why I thought you had given up cricket."

"No, m'lud, I still play when I can."

"And how many runs did you make on this particular occasion ?"

"I'm afraid my score was limited to two, m'lud, and one of those was an accident."

During the laugh that followed, Sir Austin thanked the witness and, as Humphreys showed no inclination to cross-examine him, he left the box. The barrister bowed to the judge.

"That closes the evidence for the defence, m'lud," he said.

The second day's proceedings were over, but Jack Armitage felt that he was still on the rack; that he would never know anything but torture until his fate was decided, and perhaps not then.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VERDICT

I

It was a glorious summer's morning when Sir John Armitage, leaning heavily on the arm of his lawyer, entered the central criminal court at the Old Bailey for the third and last time. Friends and relations had begged him to stay away, for the worry and anxiety which he had recently undergone had undermined his already weak state of health to such an extent that he looked as though he might collapse at any moment. But though his body was weak his spirit was unfailing, and he was determined, as he put it, to see his son through to the very end. He was filled with a bitter mortification on account of the severe cross-examination through which Humphreys had put Jack. It seemed to him that this barrister nephew of his was actuated by a spirit of vindictiveness for some reason or other, and yet he had always been a favourite at Clifton Hall, and one of Jack's best friends.

"I can't understand it, Renfrew," said the old soldier, as they took their seats in the rapidly-filling court. "Of course, Humphreys has to do his duty, but the way he pilloried Jack was unmerciful. Surely that sort of thing is not necessary ?"

"No," replied the lawyer, "it is not. The only reason I can think of for the attack is that he is doing his utmost to make good whilst acting for Sir Stephen Marlow, and he is letting nothing, not even family ties, stand in his way. He is certainly a brilliant man, but, if you'll excuse my saying so, he is unscrupulous. If I were in his place I would have refused this case. Many of my colleagues have expressed their surprise that he should be willing to prosecute when his own cousin was the prisoner."

"He's an infernal puppy," said the General vehemently; "a scoundrel; a very Judas. And I'm afraid he has not done his worst yet. He was damnably clever in his cross-questioning yesterday. Renfrew, I'm afraid for my boy."

His voice broke, and it almost looked as though tears were springing to his eyes, but he shook himself as though angry at his own weakness and sat bolt upright in his seat. A look of indomitable resolve came over his face.

"Whatever happens," he declared, "I've got to see the thing through, and not let Jack think I'm an old woman."

The court was just as crowded as before, but a hush of expectancy took the place of the babel of conversation of the preceding days. The drama was almost at its close, the curtain was about to fall. What would the finale have in store for the young prisoner — utter ruin or vindication ?

The judge was hardly seated when Sir Austin Walton commenced his speech. He used no notes and stood for the greater part of the time with his hands in his pockets, except when he occasionally rapped on the table before him for greater emphasis. He spoke directly facing the jury, only rarely turning to the judge. He started by recapitulating the incidents which led up to the death of Dr. Whitelaw, then touched on the chief points of the evidence for both sides. Up till then his manner was quiet, almost subdued, but suddenly it changed.

"Now, Members of the Jury," he said in a ringing voice, "my learned friend, in cross-examining the prisoner, showed a disposition to be harsh, unjust, almost vindictive. He practically resorted to third degree methods, which are anathema in a country which prides itself on absolute justice. He did his very utmost to confuse the prisoner, to bewilder him, and nothing that has been said in this court since the opening of this trial was more eloquent of the shame he was bringing on his noble profession than that heartfelt appeal by the lad who stands there in the dock — 'Oh, for God's sake stop baiting me !' And why was he using these methods; why was he torturing the prisoner ? Shall I tell you ? It was because he had found the young man's evidence so clear, so straightforward, and so essentially the only true story we have heard during this trial, that he felt the ground of prosecution slipping from

under his feet. He made a great outcry about the fact that the prisoner had once met Mrs. Whitelaw in a restaurant, when he had denied ever being with her, or taking her anywhere. But, gentlemen, it was an accidental meeting and had slipped the prisoner's memory. Well, are we not all liable to forget incidents that happen in our daily life? And after all why should he have mentioned that meeting? He was distinctly asked if he had taken — taken, mark you! — Mrs. Whitelaw to any of these places. If he had said, 'Yes, I had tea with her in Fiammeti's cafe,' he would not have been answering the question correctly, for he had *not taken* her there. He had met her there, not by appointment, but by chance, and naturally he had had tea with her. So would you, so would I, if we saw a lady acquaintance sitting alone in a teashop, but nobody would accuse us of having taken her there because we were in love with her.

"Again my friend made immense capital out of the fact that the prisoner took part in a knockabout dance in college. Does that prove, I ask you, that he is a dancer? Does that prove that he took Mrs. Whitelaw to dances in town, or any other place? The prisoner says he could not dance, and it is a well known fact that his friends made fun of him because of this deficiency. The man in the street knows it, as he knows most facts connected with the career of this brilliant young cricketer. Is it likely, think you, that a man of his sensitive temperament is going to a fashionable dancing place with a lady who can dance, and dance well? No, of course not! No man would willingly make a fool of himself, and you know as well as I that no lady, who can dance, is going to lead a man round a room full of good dancers when the possibilities are that he will fall over his own feet, and tread on hers most of the time. And supposing, as has been suggested, that he was in love with her! Would he insist on dancing with her then? No; he would go and learn first; and the prisoner has never learnt to dance.

"Now we come to the scorn and vituperation which my friend poured on the prisoner's remark that he felt there was another person present in the drawing-room when he was with Mrs. Whitelaw. My friend said that he was pretending to be innocent, callow. Is it so, gentlemen? I assure you it is not. He may be innocent

and he may be callow to some gross minds, but actually he is honest and pure-minded, and that is why he could not, and did not, think evil of the lady who was his best friend's wife. How could he, being the gentleman he is ? Would you or I, if we were placed in the same circumstances ? I sincerely hope not. Now it is perfectly feasible that there was a man there — we know from the evidence that the lady has often been seen with a man. Is it not quite likely that he was in the drawing-room with Mrs. Whitelaw when the prisoner called ? The butler says she was alone. I say that the butler's evidence, like that of almost every other witness for the prosecution, with the exception of the two doctors and the detective-sergeant, is unreliable. He is not an old family servant who was devoted heart and soul to his master's interests. Dr. Whitelaw married his wife about two years ago; the butler has been in his employ for a similar period. It is probable, therefore, that Mrs. Whitelaw engaged him, and also probable that he served her first and the doctor afterwards, and in stating that she was alone on that fatal evening, he was, no doubt, doing as he had been directed to do. My learned friend scoffs at the suggestion that if another man had been present he would have hidden in the alcove. I tell you that such a thing would have been the most likely course for a guilty man to adopt. If the prisoner had been sent away, and afterwards mentioned the fact casually to the suspicious doctor, what would the latter think ? If the prisoner had been shown into the room, and had found another man there, wouldn't he have recognized him again ? Again, if he had innocently mentioned his visit to the suspicious doctor and the presence of the other man; what then ? No, it was a very good idea to invite the prisoner in while the other man was hidden. When he had gone, the love-making, or whatever it was, could have been resumed with no danger of any tittle-tattle coming to the ears of Dr. Whitelaw."

Sir Austin paused for a moment and glanced quizzically at Humphreys, who was frowning and biting his nether lip viciously. Every man of the solemn-looking jury — there was no woman on it — was gazing at the counsel for the defence with rapt attention, and the prosecutor knew that they were impressed by Sir Austin's eloquence. Mr. Justice Allen lay back in his chair with his eyes

half closed, but his ears were very wide open. It was never possible to get an inkling of his thoughts. He might have been a great poker player had he taken up the game seriously. Jack Armitage, watching him, thought what a resemblance there was between him and the infamous Judge Jeffreys, many pictures of whom he had seen at various times. He breathed a silent prayer that the similarity ended with the features.

"Now we come to the actual happenings that put Armitage in the dock," resumed Sir Austin. "There is no suggestion that he did not hit Dr. Whitelaw; there is no suggestion that he did not knock the doctor down, but gentlemen, you have heard his evidence. You must agree with me that he was goaded beyond endurance. To be called a paramour, and told to take his mistress away with him was more than even you and I, with our vast experience of the world, could stand. How then do you expect a young man on the verge of life to act ? A young man filled with high ideals, whose honour was more precious to him than anything else; a young man who had always lived a clean, upright, honest existence, and who was the descendant of a family who have always made honour a fetish ? I say that he was justified to the very last degree in knocking down the man who had so insulted him, and I feel certain that you, men of honour and high ideals as I am sure you are, will agree with me. If through his blow he had killed Dr. Whitelaw and knew it, he would have been the first to have come forward and said so, and he would have been acquitted on a plea of justifiable homicide, but what are we up against ? Gentlemen, I solemnly assure you that we have to contend with a lying wife, a lying butler, and a lying private inquiry agent, who have done their best to swear away the freedom of one of the most promising young men this country can point to with pride today. Why has the woman done this ? Because she can thus clear herself of complicity and, now that her husband is dead, go to her lover in perfect equanimity and security. Something happened in that room after the prisoner left and I call upon the police to investigate to the bitter end what did happen, for I tell you that the prisoner's blow was not the cause of Dr. Whitelaw's death. Why has the butler done this ? Because he is in the pay, and under the influence, of his mistress. Why has the in-

quiry agent done this ? Because he has been approached, and I say it without hesitation — bribed ! Gentlemen, that is a serious accusation to make, but I am not making it because I am standing here shielded by the law. I would say it before a hundred witnesses in any place you care to name in London and in my private capacity, and the man Smithers would not dare to prosecute me. He is an infamous member of an infamous profession — a profession that feeds and swells and bloats itself on the frailties of sex and the sins of society; a profession that gets rich on the indiscretions of a husband, or the weaknesses of a wife. Smithers is a typical member of that blood-sucking trade, and it is to the glory of our divorce judges that they seldom, if ever, take the uncorroborated testimony of a leech of his sort in any trial that comes before them. In the case which is before you, he states, on oath, that the prisoner was in the company of Mrs. Whitelaw on May the twenty-fourth last. You have had ample proof that he lied, for the prisoner was playing cricket on that day in Worcestershire, well over a hundred miles away from London. My learned friend endeavoured to show that memories are faulty, and that he had made a mistake in the date, and Smithers agreed that such a thing was very likely. I say also that memories are faulty, nobody is more aware of that fact than I. But, gentlemen, one does not jot down an incident in a note-book on the very day it occurs, and make a mistake in the date — not unless one is an imbecile or a liar. Smithers, I say, is a liar ! It is quite likely that he did see Mrs. Whitelaw at Richmond on that day with a man, but that man was not, could not have been, the prisoner, and in that this human blood-sucker committed perjury.

"Gentlemen, yesterday afternoon you listened to the testimony of three gentlemen, whose names are known throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. They proved to you beyond a shadow of doubt that the prisoner is a most estimable young man; a young man who would scorn to come to this court and tell the smallest falsehood to save himself from the penalty of the law. How can you possibly believe these others, therefore, of whom I have spoken — these others who are lucky, and more than lucky, to be free to walk the streets today. If the prisoner was not the essentially straight-forward young man that he is,

could he not have made a statement that he *did not* even knock down Dr. Whitelaw? Who was there to prove that he did? Mrs. Whitelaw might have said so, but it would be only her word against his, and that is no proof. But instead he told the truth, and having told the truth of one thing, he would naturally tell the whole truth. I want you to remember that, and to remember also that a small lie would have saved him endless trouble and endless misery. I admire him, gentlemen; I honour him for his integrity, and for the honest, clean manner in which he gave his evidence, some of which must have cost him intolerable pain to reveal.

"There still remains the mystery — and it is a deep mystery — of Dr. Whitelaw's death. I exhort the police of this great city to renew their inquiries and to clear up the doubt once and for all. How did he die? He could not have died by falling on the carpet, where the prisoner's blow landed him. His head obviously struck the plinth of the marble statue, but when? We have the prisoner's statement; we have Mrs. Whitelaw's statement; both are different. It amounts to one word against another, which is quite enough to give the prisoner the benefit of the doubt, but in this case I contend that the lady's evidence is distinctly unreliable and I, therefore, ask you to ignore it altogether. You will then, I feel confident, give the only verdict which is possible and that, gentlemen, is an unhesitating and sincere verdict of, 'Not guilty.'"

Sir Austin gave a courteous little bow to the jury, then sat down. The twelve good men and true looked at each other earnestly, and one or two whispered together. It was obvious that most of them were considerably affected by the famous K.C.'s speech. Jack Armitage, watching them eagerly, obtained a certain amount of comfort from their expressions. Sir John was more hopeful than he had been for a long time. He felt that no one could doubt his son's innocence after such an eloquent appeal as Sir Austin had put forth.

II

Phillip Humphreys gathered his notes together and, with a look in which was mingled determination and vexation, rose in his turn to address the jury.

"May it please your lordship," he said. "Gentlemen of the Jury, you have heard Sir Austin Walton's heroic efforts to make some sort of defence possible and, with me, you are probably full of admiration for the clever way in which he has endeavoured to draw a halo of righteousness and innocence round the head of the prisoner in the dock. In order to do that, he found it necessary to work himself up into an hysterical outburst against me. He accused me of methods antagonistic to British justice; of practically trying the ordeal of the so-called third degree on the poor, sensitive prisoner. Gentlemen, you are all men of the world, and it is unnecessary for me to discuss with you such statements as those with which my friend his attempted to beguile you into listening to his pleas on behalf of the prisoner. I bear no rancour, I assure you: why should I? But all my manhood is roused to boiling point by the scurrilous attack he thought fit to launch at the witnesses for the Crown, particularly at a lady, whose only fault was that she told the truth about the incidents that took place in her house on the fatal evening of Dr. Whitelaw's death. That lady, gentlemen, is young and, as you have seen, exceedingly attractive, and because of her attractiveness, she has been the butt of every attack by the defence. If she had been plain, had lacked personality, they would not have attempted to blacken her good name as they have done. My learned friend recognized the danger; he saw at once that the prisoner stood on a house of cards which would crumple up at any moment, if he could not draw some sort of herring over the trail. And I will tell you why: because the story told by the prisoner that he and Mrs. Whitelaw were merely casual acquaintances was, on the very face of it, absurd and impossible. Mark, gentlemen, how he has contradicted himself in his own evidence! He was present at the wedding of Dr. and Mrs. Whitelaw two years ago, and has known the lady ever since. He admits that she has visited him at his college, with his father and her husband, not once but several times, that she has dined at his house, that he met her — as he says, accidentally — in Fiametti's cafe. All this he admits himself, gentlemen. I ask you, does that sound like a mere casual acquaintanceship? You are men of reason, not lunatics, yet the defence is treating you like a pack of sucking babies, when they expect you

to take in such an utterly ridiculous fairy tale. Are you going to sit there and have your intelligence scorned in that manner ?

"Now, gentlemen, what do you think is going to be the result, if an impressionable young man is thrown into the society of a young and attractive woman ? Need I answer my own question ? I want you to think of the circumstances — there are four people dining or picnicking together; two of them are men well over middle age, the other two are young, one a woman, the other a man. Is it not absolutely in the nature of things that the young people would pair off and leave their seniors to themselves, even though the woman was the wife of one of them ? Of course it is, and I say without hesitation that the prisoner became fascinated by the wife of the doctor, and pursued her relentlessly with all the passionate ardour of which a young man is capable. For her part she was weak, because she liked him and because she could not bear to hurt his feelings. She let him take her about without the doctor's knowledge; in the first place because she knew her husband was a jealous man — and there is no doubt he was — and secondly because she liked to please the prisoner. Whether or not the latter could dance is immaterial, it is my experience that a woman will dance with a man who knows nothing about the art and in a fashionable dancing place, too, out of sheer kindness; and Mrs. Whitelaw is the very person to do such a thing. My learned friend speaks contemptuously of the knockabout dances held in college. Perhaps they were in his day, but I can assure him that dances held in college nowadays are very much the reverse, and that dancing as good as any to be seen in London, can be viewed in one of these so-called knockabout dances. Mrs. Whitelaw assured us that she had danced with the prisoner, and I say he lied when he said he had not danced with her.

"The witnesses for the Crown, gentlemen, have not imagined the statements they have made. I say that they have honestly and sincerely given their evidence. My friend thinks to impress you by making a totally unwarranted attack on a man who is earning his living in a profession which is always open to attack. I refer to Mr. Smithers, who is engaged by a private inquiry agency. It is a profession, perhaps, which people of honour dislike, but it is a necessary profession for the cleansing of society. Mr. Smith-

ers was engaged by Dr. Whitelaw, who jealously suspected his wife of philandering with another man. In the course of his duties the private detective discovered that she was spending a certain amount of time with that other man. He made notes of their meetings in perfect honesty, but did he commit a heinous offence because he made a mistake in a date ?"

Humphreys paused with the air of a man who was preparing his forces to launch a big attack. And presently it came.

"It is absurd to weary you," he said sternly, "with all the nonsense which the defence has thought fit to put up as evidence. My friend becomes almost pathetic in an attempt to prove what an ideal young man the prisoner is. We know he belongs to an honourable and illustrious family, but unfortunately there have been many such families who have produced ne'er-do-well sons, and I say to you, without hesitation, that the prisoner is a libertine and an equivocator. To save himself he has tried to drag an innocent lady's name through slime and filth; a lady who had never shown anything to him but the utmost kindness, a lady who risked her own reputation in order to be good to him. I tell you his evidence was nothing but a bundle of falsehoods. He came away from Lords cricket ground on that fatal day intoxicated with his own success, and made straight for the place where he imagined he could describe his triumph and bask in the delicious words of praise that he thought would fall from Mrs. Whitelaw's lips. Perhaps she was not as enthusiastic as he expected; at all events he did not receive the favours he apparently hoped for and, when Dr. Whitelaw entered the house, he was in a reckless and savage mood. We know that the doctor in his jealousy made certain accusations, but if the prisoner had been the honest young man as delineated by my learned friend, would he not have explained everything to him ? Did he ? No, gentlemen, he did not; but like the abandoned young rake that he is, he made an unprovoked and savage attack upon a man more than twice his age and one who had probably less than half his strength.

"It is unnecessary to consider the utterly baseless and mendacious suggestion that there was somebody else hidden in the room. I am torn to the heart at the thought of what that poor young woman has had to suffer through the callous calumnies poured out

in the witness-box by the degraded young scoundrel who stands there in the dock. My friend says I was unjust, harsh, vindictive in my cross-examination. Was I? I ask you, gentlemen? No — a thousand times, no! It was the prisoner himself who made me appear severe, because he could not stand cross-examination. Why couldn't he? For the simple reason that he was afraid that the truth — as the truth must — would come to light. He could gabble an easy tale of falsehood when the truth of his story was not questioned, but as soon as it was, he contradicted himself and cried out that I was baiting him, because his coward soul knew that it had been shown up in all his infamy and baseness."

Humphreys stopped for a moment to wipe his brow, but he was soon in the midst of his indictment again.

"This young man, of angelic reputation, was goaded into knocking the doctor down, my friend says; that he or you, gentlemen, would have done the same. Oh, it is sad to think that a great legal luminary, as he undoubtedly is, could make such a plea of justification when the circumstances are as they are. The doctor fell on the carpet. He was not hurt my learned friend says, and manages to give an Arabian Night's suggestion to the case by imagining the presence of a hidden demon who came out from behind the curtain and gave the doctor the *coup-de-grâce* so that the naughty lady could live her lascivious life in peace. How perfectly fatuous and febrile! I could almost laugh at the thought that he took twelve responsible and reasonable men of the world for such utter simpletons.

"All this, gentlemen, was done to obtain your sympathy; to draw your minds away from the main issue, but it is still there. The prisoner hit Dr. Whitelaw and knocked him down. Doctor Whitelaw's head struck the base of the statue — his skull was fractured, and he died. What can possibly be plainer than that? I say that the prisoner is guilty of manslaughter in the first degree — there is no disputing it. He would have been better advised to have pleaded 'guilty' and to have thrown himself on the mercy of the court. I have seldom come across a clearer case, and one in which the prisoner made such contemptible efforts to cloak his own guilt. Many a man has been convicted of murder and suf-

fered the extreme penalty of the law for a crime which had none of the brutality and viciousness of this. Even to think of acquittal in this case would be impossible — such a verdict would be a travesty of that justice for which the English speaking races are so renowned. I ask you, gentlemen, therefore, for the verdict of guilty which you in your responsible positions as members of the jury are obliged to record."

Humphreys slowly looked along the two rows of jurymen; then, glancing across at Sir Austin Walton, he sat down.

III

Mr. Justice Allen had been sitting for some time with his head supported between his hands. He now looked up and let his sharp eyes rest on the jury.

"Members of the Jury," he said, "you have heard the evidence and the various arguments put forward by learned counsel for both the Crown and the defence. There is little for me to say. My only business is to show you clearly the issues you have to consider. There is little doubt that Dr. Whitelaw suspected his wife of carrying on an intrigue with a man, and finding the prisoner in a highly compromising attitude with the lady, he immediately jumped to the conclusion that he was the guilty party and the consequent quarrel ended with the fatal blow. Now, gentlemen, you must consider during your deliberations whether the prisoner was the actual man whom the — er — private inquiry agent had been watching. The man, Smithers, states in his evidence that he recognized the prisoner as the person he had seen with Mrs. Whitelaw, but he admits that he did not know who he was until the day after Dr. Whitelaw's death. In addition to this he made a definite statement that he had seen him and the woman together in Richmond on May the twenty-fourth, when the prisoner was away near Leominster. This private detective had noted down these particulars in a book, but declares that he may have been mistaken in the date. It is for you to decide, gentlemen, whether this can be accepted as reasonable and, if not, whether any of the statements made by witness are reliable. If, in your opinion, the prisoner was not the man with whom Mrs.

Whitelaw was so often seen, you are bound to take into consideration that fact in your ultimate decision. At the same time I warn you that you must not lose sight, for a moment, of the actual issue. It is admitted that the prisoner struck Dr. Whitelaw, and knocked him down, but the defence contends that it was not through that blow that the doctor died. You have heard the prisoner's story; you have also heard the evidence of the principal witness for the Crown. You are left to judge between them. If, in your opinion, the deceased doctor did not die through the actual blow delivered by the prisoner, you will find the latter not guilty of manslaughter. If, on the other hand, you are agreed that the prisoner was responsible for the death of the deceased, you will find him guilty. In order to come to a proper verdict it will be necessary for you to sift the masses of contradictory statements which you have heard, and I admonish you to do it with care and patience. In reviewing the testimony of the prisoner you must consider with circumspection: firstly the fact that he admits that his blow felled his victim to the floor; secondly that the doctor died as the result of a fractured skull through his head coming into violent contact with the base of a marble statue. The evidence of the Crown points to the fact very clearly that there was only one fall and, therefore, it is presumable that the prisoner's blow knocked Dr. Whitelaw down in such a way that his head hit the statue then and at no other time. The defence alleges that the doctor rose from the floor, stumbled and fell a second time, but such an allegation is entirely without proof. Any other suggestion as to the cause of death cannot be admitted in the evidence. You must allow no considerations of age, family, or popularity to influence you whatsoever, and the fact that the prisoner is a somewhat notable figure in sporting circles must be entirely lost sight of during your deliberations. You may retire, gentlemen."

Mr. Justice Allen stifled a yawn, rose, and disappeared. The jury filed out one by one, and the prisoner was taken below to await, with all the self-control and calmness he could muster, the verdict of the twelve. It was forty minutes before they returned to the court, and to Jack Armitage time seemed to have practically stopped. Never in all his life had he known the minutes to tick away with more dreadful sluggishness. After a while he be-

came almost hysterical with anxiety — it was as though he were suffering under a new and refined form of torture. He felt that anything would be better than having to go on waiting, waiting without knowing what was in store for him. All hope was not dead yet, but there was the doubt. Ah ! the doubt ! Supposing he were found guilty, what would they do with him — would he receive a very severe sentence ? He felt an inclination to ask a warder, but his pride prevented him, and there was also a feeling of dread at what the answer might be. The judge had not been very helpful, he feared. He knew little about these things, of course, but it had seemed to him that the few remarks by Mr. Justice Allen had been very much to his disadvantage. Perhaps the jury would not be influenced. They seemed such a decent lot of fellows. His misgivings were brought to an abrupt termination by the entrance of one of the warders, who had been outside in the passage.

"Come along, young man !" he said cheerfully.

Armitage felt as though his heart had jumped into his mouth. So the waiting was over at last; he would soon know now. Yet now that the time was come, he felt that he would rather have the waiting all over again. He dreaded going in there and — ! He pulled himself together and squared his shoulders. Well, come what may he had to face it, and face it he would, with all the courage he could command.

He returned to the court and received a pale, but staunch and encouraging, smile from his father. It caused him to give just a little firmer jerk to his shoulders. The jury resumed their seats with the solemn air of men with great responsibility on their shoulders, and almost immediately the judge re-entered.

The clerk of the court addressed the jury.

"Members of the Jury," he said, "are you agreed on your verdict ?"

The foreman, a stoutish gentleman with a high voice, replied that they had.

"Is the prisoner guilty or not guilty ?"

"Guilty !"

Every drop of blood receded from Jack Armitage's face, leaving it ghastly, but he still held his head high and not a tremor

disturbed his features. A muffled groan broke from Sir John's ashen lips, otherwise there was a dead silence in court. Sir Austin sprang to his feet.

"I hope, m'lud," he said to the judge, "that in passing sentence, you will take into consideration the fact that the prisoner has always borne a very high reputation for integrity, and that he has never come under the ban of the law in any way before. I do not think I can add a great deal to what has already been told to the court regarding the prisoner's character, but — "

"I think all that is necessary has been said, Sir Austin — " interrupted his lordship irritably.

"Then I hope you will give full consideration to my plea, m'lud."

Sir Austin sat down and the judge nodded to the clerk, who arose and addressed the prisoner.

"Prisoner at the bar," he said, "you stand convicted of manslaughter. Have you anything to say why the court should not give judgment according to law ?"

"I can only say that I am entirely innocent, my lord," replied Jack in a clear, ringing voice.

"John Armitage," said Mr. Justice Allen, in cold, acidulous tones, "you have been found guilty of manslaughter, and I thoroughly endorse the jury's verdict. The defence was set up that you knocked down the deceased doctor, but that he was not injured and fell some distance from the marble statue which caused his death. The facts of the case, however, proved beyond question that that was not so; that your blow was so vicious and powerful that the doctor staggered and fell, striking his head with such force against the plinth of the statue that he died almost immediately. It appears that you were practically unprovoked, and that you hit the doctor with the intention of doing him injury, if not of causing his death. In your evidence you did your utmost to save yourself by besmirching the reputation of a woman. I consider that your conduct throughout has been most reprehensible and cowardly. In view of all these facts I am unable to justify in my own conscience the plea for leniency which your counsel has put forward on account of the good reputation you have apparently enjoyed up to now. The law was instituted for

the protection of society; you have grossly broken one of the fundamental principles of that law. You have committed a very serious crime which can only be exculpated by a severe penalty. You will go to penal servitude for ten years."

There was an almost audible gasp of dismay from the crowded rows of spectators. Jack Armitage half recoiled and his eyes closed involuntarily as though he had received a smart slap on the face. Suddenly there was a commotion in the well of the court. Sir John tore himself from the restraining arm of Renfrew and sprang to the front of the judicial bench where he faced the judge with his eyes flashing the very agonies of hell.

"And you call this justice," he cried in a strangled voice, "you, who sit there and send an innocent lad to degradation and worse! My God! To think that my country, which I have served and bled for, should put the reins of justice into the hands of a callous brute like you!" He roughly shook off the hands that strove to draw him back, and turned vehemently on Phillip Humphreys who had approached close to him. "You devil!" he shouted, "you blackguard! You, the son of my sister, to degrade your birth, your blood, and the honour of your race by your damnable lies. May God have pity on your soul, for you have — you have — "

He suddenly gave a choking gasp, made a further effort to speak, staggered and crashed to the floor. Jack gave one horrified cry, tore open the gate of the dock, thrust aside the two warders, as though they had been children, and dashed to the side of his father before anybody else had fully grasped what had happened. He threw himself on his knees, and for one tragic moment called to Sir John in a heartbroken voice — but the old soldier would never speak again.

Presently with the unrestrained tears blinding his eyes, Jack rose to his feet. He looked at the judge, who was frowning in an indecisive manner.

"You have sent me to ten years penal servitude," he said, "but I am young and I'll come back, and when I do, you can hide in the darkest, most remote corner you can find, but I'll get you, not because of what you have done to me, but because you have killed my father." A warder caught him roughly by the arm, but he

shook it off with very little effort. "And as for you," he cried, turning to Humphreys. "You also will be safe for ten years, but once I am free you'll answer to me to the very dregs for what you have done, and pay to the last drop of blood in your vile body."

Turning, he dropped once more on his knees by his dead father's side and kissed, with infinite tenderness, the cheeks of the man he had loved and admired. Then rising to his feet he addressed the warders.

"All right," he said. "I am ready! Look after Dad, Renfrew," he added with a heartbroken sob.

The lawyer nodded dumbly. His grief was too intense to allow him to speak.

And so Jack Armitage, cricketer and gentleman, passed down to the depths.

CHAPTER IX

THE GIRL AND THE CONVICT

Sir John Armitage was buried with full military honours, and by the efforts of Sir Austin Walton, Mr. Renfrew, and highly placed friends of the late general, Jack Armitage was allowed to attend the last sad rites. The old soldier's funeral took place in the district he had loved so well, and was followed by a vast concourse of people, including many illustrious representatives of the Army and other services. Nearly everyone from the surrounding countryside was present, and the trend of local opinion was shown with intense sincerity when the mourners returned from the grave side. Both Sir Fellowes Allen and Phillip Humphreys were recognized and were wildly hooted. In fact at one particular spot, near the gates of Clifton Hall, the crowd looked very ugly, and it was probably only the quick action of an officer in command of a company of troops that saved them from being roughly handled. He told off a platoon to surround their coach and they were thus saved from being mobbed.

Jack Armitage, who had followed the gun carriage on foot to the family vault, was put into a car at the gates of the cemetery directly after the burial service was concluded, and taken straight back to London. This manœuvre undoubtedly saved the police a lot of trouble, for the local populace were waiting all along the road to catch a glimpse of him, and it was quite likely that the bolder spirits would have attempted a rescue, so incensed were they over the trial and its tragic conclusion.

After his conviction, Armitage had been lodged in Wormwood Scrubbs prior to being transferred to Dartmoor. His father's death had snapped the remaining threads of his self-restraint.

The degradation of being clothed in prison attire, of being given a number, and knowing himself for a convict, had abased his proud spirit to the core. He experienced a sudden revulsion against religion and felt that the belief he had previously had in the goodness of God had reverted on him and made him realize what a hollow mockery faith and trust and hope could be. In the narrow confines of his cell he spent hours pacing up and down, brokenhearted, despairing, desperate; at one time calling his father by name with the gentle insistence of an inconsolable woman; at another cursing the people whom he blamed for his father's death, who had brought about his own ruin; cursing his Creator, everything that was good, or pure, or holy through teeth that were clenched with the fierceness of a profane hatred. For some time Jack Armitage was in danger of a mental breakdown; his suffering was terrible, the agony of his tragic loss was eating into the very cells of his brain. He was no longer the charming, eager, happy youth of a few weeks ago — he had become aware of only one emotion now and that emotion was a fierce, deadly, merciless hatred. He had no desire to live for anything but revenge; revenge on those who had been instrumental in robbing him of the most cherished possession he had in life — his father.

The funeral calmed him down somewhat; a flood of tears bringing relief and probably saving him from insanity. On his return to Wormwood Scrubbs, he became more tractable, a little more compliant. But that cold malignity remained and, as the days went on, it increased, rather than diminished, until it had wormed its way into the very soul of the man. His better nature made a dying struggle to reassert itself, but gradually it lost all hold on him and faded out altogether. He became hard, cynical, mordacious, and even his companions in misfortune left him severely alone, while the warders put him down as a surly, dangerous brute, and kept a watchful eye on him. It was not only his character that altered, his face changed also as time went on. Lines came at the corners of his lips and between his eyes, and all gentleness vanished from his expression, whilst the eyes themselves gradually became fierce and restless and gave him the look of an untamed animal. Time lessened his sorrow, but only in-

created his resentment against fate, religion, and humanity, and he openly sneered at the services which were held in the prison.

He was a month at Wormwood Scrubbs before he was transferred to Dartmoor, and as he was taken across the bleak, dismal moor he laughed aloud in the bitterness of his soul. How like the very end of everything this was: like a lost soul going to the depths of perdition. Well, he had reached there already; he could not go any deeper — Dartmoor certainly would make no difference. A warder harshly bade him to be quiet. He turned and scowled at the fellow, but said nothing.

He was taken before the deputy-warden and found that the latter was a man he knew well. Three weeks before, such a meeting would have been the last straw in his bitter humiliation. Now it made no difference: he had reached the bottomless pit long ago. The warden was confused, embarrassed; tried to be kind in a hesitating sort of way, but he was a good fellow; no idea of forgetting the previous intimacy occurred to him.

"This is beastly," he murmured. "Of course I was expecting you and all that, but — well, I'm damned sorry!"

"Take my advice," said Armitage, "and forget that you ever knew me. And keep your sorrow for yourself," he added churlishly; "I can do without it!"

The deputy thought he understood; he felt no resentment.

"Jove!" he said sympathetically. "You've been hit hard!"

Armitage laughed harshly, then:

"What business is it of yours if I have?" he growled. "I certainly have not asked for your sympathy."

Through the ministrations of his erstwhile friend he was given a light job in the infirmary, but he yearned for something more strenuous; something which would help to make the days pass quicker and give him less time for brooding. His temper, ever hasty, now flamed up on the slightest provocation. A fortnight after his arrival at Dartmoor, a warder spoke to him roughly and caught him by the arm. In a flash Armitage felled him to the ground, then walked along to another warder and reported himself. A week's solitary confinement was the result, and the undying resentment of the man he had knocked down. He

was sent to one of the outdoor gangs when released from his incarceration, and in the open air, doing hard work, he found a certain amount of solace.

Day after day, week after week, month after month went by and the iron of the place entered into his already seared soul. After a year his surliness and quick temper had become proverbial and he had already lost a certain proportion of his 'good' time through indiscretions into which his hastiness had led him. Eventually he began to see for himself that his conduct was merely proving a handicap and that he himself was the greatest sufferer, whereupon he set to work with cold, calculating deliberation to obtain entire control of his moods and passions. He disciplined himself in the most rigid manner, and that he succeeded was a tribute to his will-power, for times out of number he was goaded beyond endurance by certain undiscerning warders who, in their ignorance, thought the change that had come over him was due to the fact that his spirit had broken.

He had been in Dartmoor for nearly three years when the event occurred which robbed him of all remaining hope of any remission of his sentence, and brought him face to face with the prospect of having to serve every day of his ten years' penal servitude.

It was a cold, dismal November day and he, with a gang of convicts, was out repairing a wall that had become insecure. Two guards sat on another wall close by, passing the time in desultory conversation. The gang under their charge was generally considered to be a particularly harmless one, although it included two reprieved murderers and a man sentenced for manslaughter, but the latter for some time now had been quiet and submissive, and the other two had never given any trouble.

A road running over the moors passed within a few yards, and not far away was a farmhouse. Armitage had been working steadily at his brick-laying and taking little notice of anything else, but suddenly he became aware of a speck on the road in the distance and knew it for an approaching motor car. An idea flashed into his mind; an idea both fantastical and daring. Without stopping to consider the risk he would be taking, he decided to act. The car rapidly drew nearer and covertly, with narrowed eyes, he watched its approach. When it was within a hundred

yards, he suddenly sprang on the nearest warder and, with a savage blow, knocked him over the wall. Before the other man had time to recover from his surprise and grapple with the prisoner, he had also received the same summary treatment. By this time the car was only a few yards away, but the driver had noticed the attack and, in his interest and curiosity, had slowed down. He was a thoroughly astonished and scared man a second later when the aggressive convict sprang on to the running board and commanded him to drive at his fastest speed, threatening him with all sorts of penalties if he did not obey.

One glance at Armitage's face decided the man that his safest course would be to do what he was told, and the car sped forward as though in eager response. The second warder, however, had not been stunned by the blow he had received and, springing to his feet, he raised his rifle without hesitation and fired. He had been a sniper in France during the War, and Armitage, who was still standing on the running board, felt a sudden excruciating pain in his left shoulder. He reeled and would have fallen had he not been clutching tightly on to the car. At the same time there was a sharp cry from the tonneau of the machine, and looking in he saw a young girl of not more than sixteen years of age. He took little notice of her, however, and painfully dragged open the door and slid on to the seat next to the driver. Another shot was fired as he did so, but by this time the car was travelling at such a speed that it was rapidly lengthening the range and no further harm was done.

The wound in his shoulder was giving Armitage agony and he could feel the blood running down his back. The girl in the tonneau leaned forward and touched him gently. With an effort he glanced round.

"You are badly hurt," she said. "Let us stop for a few minutes, while I tie up the wound."

"Very kind of you," he replied shortly, "but I'd rather be hurt than captured," and he urged the driver to go faster.

The latter had by this time thought things over and it had occurred to him that a wounded man could not be very dangerous. Suddenly he slowed down and stopped. Armitage turned on him with fierce inquiry, but he sprang from the car, and in his hand

he held a spanner which he had picked up from the floor.

"Now then," he snarled, "get out and be quick about it!"

The girl gave a sharp cry and leaned forward.

"Drive on, Harris!" she implored. "This poor man is wounded, and — and we can't leave him to be caught again."

"I don't care whether he is wounded or not, miss," said the driver doggedly; "he's got to get out. I'm not going to be accused of helping a convict to escape."

Armitage felt savagely impotent; his left arm was now quite useless and he knew that the driver held the upper hand, armed as he was with a spanner. But he did not get out, instead he moved suddenly into the driving seat and put the car into gear — the engine was still running. Before the other man had quite grasped what had occurred the machine had shot forward but, with a flying leap, he sprang on to the running board and, hanging on precariously, brought down the spanner on to the unprotected head of the convict. The latter fell forward over the wheel, the car swerved, ran into a ditch, and half turned over. The man was thrown off and the girl was flung violently from one side of the tonneau to the other, but luckily was not injured.

Harris rose to his feet slowly and shook himself.

"Hope you're not hurt, miss," he said sheepishly. "I had to do it, otherwise they would have accused us of helping him to escape."

"Oh, what have you done?" she sobbed. "You're a brute, and you've probably killed him!"

"Not on your life, miss. I didn't hit hard enough for that."

He dragged the unconscious form of the convict out of the car and laid him on the grass. The girl immediately ran to a pool near by and, tearing a strip off her petticoat, soaked it in the water. Harris sullenly obeyed her commands to take off Armitage's coat and, ripping open the shirt round the wound, she bathed the ugly little bullet hole and endeavoured to staunch the flow of blood. In this she was only partially successful, but she made a rough bandage with another piece torn off her petticoat, then turned her attention to his head.

"Nice pickle we're in," growled Harris. "How I'm going to get the blooming car out of the ditch, I don't know."

"It is your own fault," she retorted sharply. "If you had driven on, this wouldn't have happened."

"We'd look nice when we were stopped, wouldn't we ?" sneered the man. "The police would say it was a plant."

"You could easily have explained that you were forced to drive on," she said severely; "and nothing can excuse your brutality in hitting a wounded man on the head."

She was a most self-possessed young lady for her years and simply radiated capability and assurance.

"I'm afraid it is quite impossible for him to escape now," she went on, "and I shall never forgive you — never !"

While she was speaking Armitage had regained consciousness. For a moment he could not recollect what had happened but, as the meaning of her words dawned on him, memory came back with a rush. She suddenly became aware of his recovery and looked down at him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're better," she said. "I am most awfully sorry Harris was such a brute — I would have stopped him if I could have done so."

He looked at her with a certain measure of surprise. She was a pretty girl with brown hair, large hazel eyes, a clear satiny complexion, and small regular features. He had forgotten that there might be human beings still left in the world who had feelings of humanity and kindness. For a second the hardness of his face was gone and she caught a glimpse of something which she never forgot. It was only momentary, however, and with an impatient exclamation he strove to rise to his feet. She helped him up, and kept her arm in his as he swayed giddily on his feet.

"What are you going to do ?" she asked. "You can't go far in this condition and, as you see, the car is in the ditch."

"I shall have to — " he commenced, then stopped and laughed bitterly. "It is decided for me !" he added.

Tearing along the road towards them was a car full of armed warders. It came to a standstill close by, and the men swarmed out and surrounded the convict. Harris explained how he had obtained the better of Armitage, and received the congratulations of the warders with a smirk of satisfaction. The girl stood by without saying a word — her face had gone very white.

"Well, sixty-seven," said the man in charge of the party callously, "you've got what you've deserved for a long time. Come along; march! We'll send back a car with ropes to pull your machine out of the ditch," he added to Harris.

"Right, thanks!" said the chauffeur.

Armitage, swaying like a drunken man, was hustled into the car and driven back to the prison. The girl stood watching his departure until he was out of sight, after which she sat down on the bank beside the road and cried softly. Harris watched her uneasily for a moment or two, then shrugged his shoulders and went to examine the car to see if it had sustained much damage.

The wound in the shoulder of convict 67 was rather serious, and brought on a high fever. For days he existed in a state of delirium, but his strong constitution eventually got the better of the fever and he began to recover. It was over six weeks before he left the infirmary, however, and was taken before the warden to answer for the offence of having attempted to escape. His punishment was severe, and he was informed that he had forfeited all right to any reduction of sentence, and would have to stay in Dartmoor, unless transferred to another prison, until the whole of his ten years' penal servitude had expired.

He made no further attempt to escape, and during the remaining seven years of his incarceration there were no complaints against him. His morose and surly manner, however, caused him to be heartily disliked by all the warders with whom he came into contact and it was little wonder, therefore, that they subjected him to indignities which, under ordinary circumstances, he would have escaped.

At the beginning of his term in Dartmoor he had had visitors, but as he refused point-blank to see anyone but Renfrew, it was not long before he was left severely alone. The lawyer he saw — principally because he was compelled to — about matters concerning his estate. Most of the money which his father had left had been tied up in gilt-edged securities and, although the death duties had been very heavy, the interest was accumulating by leaps and bounds, making Armitage's fortune increase enormously every year. Mr. Renfrew, now growing old, still looked

after the estate personally and his management was thorough, complete, and strictly conscientious. He was probably the only human being whom Armitage still treated with any respect.

As the years went by Convict 67 began planning his future. He had brooded and brooded until he felt that the only thing he lived for was vengeance. During his last two years in Dartmoor he set about selecting men whom he thought he could trust to further his designs. It was not an easy matter, for any intercourse between prisoners was strictly forbidden, but there are ways and means and Armitage was particularly successful in discovering methods of communicating with those whom he desired to enlist in his service. He observed them for months first, learnt all about their sentences, the crimes they had committed; studied their characteristics, temperament, and bearing — for only in prison does a man disclose his nature in all the nakedness of its imperfections and frailties — then made his overtures to them. This process was gradual and entirely dependent upon the manner in which they received his first carefully chosen and guarded words. He took care to select those who, he knew, would be released before his term expired, but not too long before. The result of his particularity was that, as the date of his release drew near, he had enlisted a band of men in his service, who were thoroughly conversant with his plans, entirely reckless of the consequences, and prepared to follow him to hell itself, provided adequate benefit to themselves accrued, and not a whisper of his preparations reached the ears of the authorities.

Thus, after ten degrading years spent in the shadows, Jack Armitage returned to the light.

CHAPTER X

AFTER TEN YEARS

"And so, Armitage," said the governor cheerfully, "you're once more a free man!"

Armitage stood in the office of the grey-haired man who ruled the destinies of Dartmoor, and awaited his discharge.

"It is a great pity," went on the governor, "that you allowed your resentment to get the better of your common sense, otherwise you would have been a free man a long time ago. I was not here, of course, when you attempted to escape, but I'm afraid it was a very big mistake for a man of your intelligence to make. However, that is all over now, and I hope that years of happiness will obliterate the memory of your ten years of sorrow. I think I am at liberty to tell you now that I always felt that there was something wrong about your conviction. It wasn't prejudice because I had served under your father, neither was it because I was, and am, very interested in cricket. But I believe I was one of the several indignant people, who asserted that a big mistake had been made."

Armitage bowed coldly; the prolixity of the governor annoyed him.

"What are your plans?" inquired that undaunted man after a pause. "Are you going abroad for a time?"

"No," was the uncompromising answer. "I am going to set to work at once to avenge my father's death and the stain on my own honour."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the governor in alarm. "You are not really serious? My dear boy," he added rising, and placing his hand on Armitage's shoulder, "you must not nurse thoughts

like that. I know you have suffered a lot, but the really great man is he who can forgive wrongs."

"I am not a great man," declared the other sternly, "and I do not forgive wrongs, particularly those that have made my father suffer. Nothing you can say, or do, will alter my determination. I've lived for this for ten years, and neither you, nor anybody else can make the slightest difference."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," said the governor regretfully, and returned to his seat. He looked at his *vis-à-vis,* hoping that he would see some sign in his face denoting that he had not meant what he had said, but there was nothing there but relentless — in fact ruthless — determination.

As upright as ever, but infinitely thinner, stood Jack Armitage. The bronze of his face had gone, and was replaced by a pallor emphasized by deep lines at the corners of his mouth and eyes, between the eyes and on his forehead — obdurate, relentless lines. The eyes themselves were truculent and merciless, and caused the kindly governor to shiver a little as he looked at them. Gone also was the profusion of unruly hair; it had become rather thin, and there were streaks of grey at the temples. A complete metamorphosis had come over Jack Armitage and there was little at thirty-four reminiscent of the happy youth who, ten years before, had won his spurs at Lords.

"It is quite likely," he remarked, "that I shall return here. But I shall come back with the feeling that my life's work is concluded, for I shall have made the fiends, who brought about my father's death, suffer to the very dregs."

"I hope," observed the governor, "that I will never see you here again."

"I hope not," replied Armitage; "but it is not very material to me where I go, or what I do, once I have obtained retribution."

The governor sighed.

"Is nobody meeting you ?" he asked.

"No; I asked for this suit of clothes to be sent to me, and gave instructions for a car to be waiting to take me home — that's all. I don't want to be met by anybody."

"I am afraid you are very bitter."

"Bitter !" exclaimed Armitage harshly. "Have you no under-

standing — no realization of the degradation, the foulness, the prostitution that my soul — if I have such a thing — has suffered by this imprisonment? Can't you even visualize what the death of my father meant to me? He died of a broken heart because he knew I was innocent; and my conviction — savage and monstrous as it was — was his last living impression. Yet you calmly say I am bitter. If you had been in my place and suffered what I have suffered, would you go round to the brutes who had killed your father and desecrated your soul, and tell them that you had forgiven them? Would you feel bitter?"

The governor rose hastily.

"I have already been informed that a car is waiting for you," he said. "I can only hope that time will heal your — your sorrow. I wish you good-bye and good luck!"

He held out his hand. Armitage hesitated a moment, then took it ungraciously. A little while later he heard the gates of Dartmoor clang behind him and knew himself to be free. His hand stole into the side of his right shoe, and he pulled forth a dirty, crumpled scrap of paper. By some means or other he had managed to secret this piece of paper ever since his trial and, despite the searches he had undergone, it had never been discovered. He opened it out now and read it. The ink was somewhat faded but the words were still distinct.

Don't spare her, Jack. She has lied and lied to damn you, and now she has forfeited every right to consideration because of her womanhood. Drag her name in the mud, which is the only element for which she is fit! Good luck, my boy!

"Good luck, my boy!" repeated Armitage to himself, and walked over to where a brand new car was awaiting him.

A chauffeur held open the door for him to enter, and touched his cap respectfully. The ex-convict was startled for a moment: it seemed curious, and rather absurd, that anyone should salute him.

"I was told by Mr. Renfrew, sir," said the chauffeur, "that I was to inquire whether you would drive all the way home by road,

or go by train from Plymouth ? There is a suit case packed with necessaries inside, sir."

"I'll go all the way by road," decided Armitage.

"Very well, sir. At what town shall we stop for the night, sir ?" He spread out a large road map before his employer.

Jack Armitage bit his lip. To come back to civilization after ten years is not an easy matter — there must be enormous changes in the world in that period, he reflected, and he would have preferred to go straight home and gradually accustom himself to his new life. However, it was four o'clock in the afternoon, and Buckinghamshire is a considerable distance from Dartmoor.

"I don't mind," he said; "I'll leave it to you. But choose the quietest hotel you can find."

"Very well, sir."

Armitage climbed into the luxurious interior of the limousine, and settled himself for the journey, while the driver walked round and took his seat at the wheel. Suddenly the door of the far side was snatched open and Armitage found himself confronted by a most remarkable-looking individual. He stared at him in astonishment whilst the latter introduced himself.

"Glad to be the first to congratulate you on your release, Mr. Armitage, sir," he said. "My name is Benjamin Shadlow, called 'Benny' by my pals for short. I almost missed you — due to the wretched roads entirely, I assure you. Now, sir, I — whoa !" The exclamation was to the driver who, not noticing him, had started the car.

"Who are you ?" asked Armitage coldly; "and what do you want ?"

"Just a minute, sir."

He searched for something in his pocket and, while he was thus engaged, the other subjected him to a critical examination. He was tall and loose limbed with a distinct slouch. He had large hands, which seemed to be continually in his way, and feet to match. His hair was sandy and unkempt, his face red and coarse, with eyebrows practically non-existent. His eyes were red-rimmed, and of so pale a colour that it looked as though constant bathing in boric lotion had caused them to fade. His

nose was long, and his mouth pendulous and large with a perpetual cigarette hanging from his nether lip. He had scarcely any chin and what there was of it appeared to be making affectionate overtures to a large overgrown Adam's apple, while his forehead receded in apologetic fashion as though attempting to efface itself in the sandy wastes above it. Despite his physical disadvantages, however, he was well, almost smartly, dressed — if one closed one's eyes to a vivid green tie — and the hat he held in his hand was a very good velour.

He produced an oblong of pasteboard, which he presented to Armitage with a flourish. The latter took it and read:

THE AYLESBURY RECORDER
Mr. Benjamin Shadlow

Immediately, with an angry exclamation, he threw the card on the floor of the car.

"Do you mean to tell me," he demanded, "that you are a reporter?"

"I am, sir, but journalist is a term I like better." He had a habit of speaking like a machine gun in action, and it never seemed necessary for him to stop and take breath. "I came all the way from Aylesbury in my little jigger — sixty pound secondhand, twenty pound cash down and balance by instalments — in order to be the first in the kill, you see, sir. It is my studied opinion that —"

"Clear off! I am not going to be bothered with newspaper men now or hereafter, and if I catch you hanging round again, there'll be trouble in store for you."

"I am sorry to hear that, because you will find that I am one of those fellows who can do a lot to make —"

He received a violent push in the chest and staggered back. The door of the limousine closed with a bang, and Mr. Benjamin Shadlow was left gazing after it as it sped away along the road. He shook his head sadly.

"Rather a vulgarian, I'm afraid," he muttered, "but what can you expect from a man who has been incarcerated in a prison for ten years!"

He strolled across the road to where a small two-seater car,

resplendent in a coat of new paint, was awaiting him and, walking round the machine with an air of proprietorship, presently climbed in and took his place at the wheel.

"Never say die, my lad," he murmured. "It was only by grit and determination that Northcliffe, Beaverbrook, and Scott became great newspaper men. I will follow this Armitage up anyway."

He set his little car in motion and bowled along the road in the wake of the big saloon.

It was the height of a glorious summer's day when Jack Armitage left Dartmoor and commenced his journey to the home which he had not seen for ten years, but there was little excitement in his veins. The long years, spent in brooding and looking forward to his day of vengeance, had almost entirely robbed him of the capacity to appreciate or enjoy anything, and long vistas of beautiful Devonian scenery swept by practically unnoticed. Occasionally he looked out of the windows, but for the most part he spent the time in sitting with his arms folded, staring straight ahead of him. There was no eagerness to be home; no picturing of the house and estates he had loved; no wondering if they would look the same or be very much altered. He had become a living man with a dead heart, and the only thoughts he allowed himself were of retribution and the final settlement with his enemies. As the car sped along, he carefully went over in his mind the plans he had made, readjusting here, co-ordinating there, until he felt that there could be no mistake. The last information he had had from his lawyer was to the effect that his available assets amounted to nearly two and a half million pounds sterling, and he was prepared to spend every penny of that huge sum, if need be, to further the success of his designs.

Mile after mile passed by under the rapid wheels of the limousine. Shady woods, rippling brooks, orchards in full blossom, quaint hamlets, quainter villages, and pretty market towns, nestling comfortably in the shelter of green hills and glorious trees, flashed by; and yet the heart of the man who sat in solitary state within the car was not moved. In his misanthropy he had not even felt any pleasure in noting the luxuriousness of the machine in which he was travelling; the great difference that

had taken place in motor manufacture, upholstery, and fittings since he had last driven in a car.

They passed through Exeter, Taunton, and Weston-super-Mare, and eventually reached Bath where the chauffeur drew up for the night. He had chosen a small but respectable hotel and Armitage expressed himself as satisfied with his choice. The millionaire had refused to stop anywhere for tea and, in spite of himself, he felt hungry as he stepped within the well-kept hostelry and found his nostrils assailed by the enticing odour of food.

He made his ablutions in his neat little bedroom, and gazed round him with a feeling of unreality. After his long experience of a prison cell, it seemed to him that this small, plainly-furnished room was the acme of luxury. He found himself touching things, examining them as though he had never seen them before, until suddenly his mind reverted to its one pregnant topic and, uttering an impatient exclamation, he went down to the dining-room. He ate mechanically, appearing to take no particular interest in the dishes placed before him; and he had almost finished when in walked somebody who appeared to be in a hurry and, with a murmured word of apology, took a vacant seat at his table.

He looked up with a scowl, hating his solitude to be disturbed even in this commonplace fashion. The next moment he laid down his spoon and fork and, leaning across the table, spoke through teeth that were almost clenched.

"If I thought you had followed me," he said, "I would get up from this table and throw you into the street."

Mr. Benjamin Shadlow looked hurt.

"I am very sorry you should think I had followed you, sir," he said in tones of deep respect. "But, if you will kindly consider, you will realize that it is impossible. You must have arrived some time ago; I have only just got here."

Armitage sat back with a grunt; Mr. Benjamin Shadlow sighed with relief. As a matter of fact he had followed closely behind the limousine all the way, in spite of the dust and strain it had entailed and, tracking it up to the hotel door, had then gone for a spin round Bath in order to make it appear that he

had only just arrived. He commenced to eat, wondering if an opportunity would present itself of allowing him to get into conversation with this grim and chilling millionaire. It came sooner than he expected, and from the very least expected quarter.

Armitage had been regarding his table companion with a scowl for some time, but it had occurred to him that he might be able to make use of this persistent reporter to his own advantage. Suddenly he leaned forward again, and the journalistic young man almost dropped his knife and fork in alarm.

"How did you know I was coming out ?" demanded Armitage.

"Why," exclaimed Shadlow with relief and a quick appreciation of his unexpected good fortune, "everybody knows about it, sir. All the papers made a feature of it, and some of them gave an account of your career and a brief syn — synopsis of the trial."

"Oh, they did, did they ?" said Armitage harshly.

"Most of them were pretty decent about it, sir," went on Benjamin eagerly. "Quite grandiloquent in fact !"

"Quite what ?" snapped the other.

"I — er — mean to say, sporty," exclaimed Shadlow, wishing that his weakness for big words would not betray him before people who obviously understood their meanings.

"Very kind of them," sneered Armitage.

"Of course," went on the irrepressible Benjamin, "my paper made a special feature of your release. Everybody in the district believes in your innocence, and always has done. So we laid ourselves out when we knew you were being relinquished — I — er — mean repatriated —"

"What exactly do you mean ?" asked Armitage icily.

"When you left the lock-up, sir."

"Ah, that's better. Now we understand each other. Go on !"

Benjamin's airy manner underwent a slight change. His machine-gun method of speech, too, quieted down considerably; he had never met quite such a cold, dispassionate person before.

"We printed the whole story from beginning to end," he said, "and hinted that there had been a miscarriage of justice. Then we started a fund to give you a welcome home. Everybody subscribed and, by gum ! it ain't half going to be a topping affair." In his enthusiasm he lapsed into slang.

"Listen to me!" said Armitage deliberately. "There is going to be no welcome home, do you understand? Before you go to bed tonight, you will send a telegram and stop anything of that nature."

Benjamin's pale eyes flickered with distress.

"Oh, but, sir — " he commenced.

"Don't argue! I mean what I say."

"But there'll be no end of a rumpus — all the money has been subscribed and — "

"That is immaterial to me. If the owner of your paper will let me know the amount that has been subscribed, I'll send him a cheque so that he can return every penny that has been collected; but on no account is there to be a public welcome. Do you understand?"

The eyes that bored into his convinced Mr. Shadlow that there would be a bigger and more dangerous rumpus if he did not stop the reception. He nodded sadly.

"Go out and send the wire!" commanded Armitage, "and then come to me in my room — number ten — I want to speak to you."

Without another word he left the table. Benjamin, in a whirl of mixed emotions, sat on until he had finished his coffee, then went out and sent a telegram. Half an hour later he knocked at the door of Armitage's room and was bidden to enter. He found the millionaire ex-convict sitting in an armchair, that only just held him, sipping the first whisky and soda he had tasted for ten years. Armitage nodded to another chair and Shadlow sat down.

"Have a whisky and soda?" invited the former.

"No, thank you, sir," said Benjamin. "I don't drink when there is business on hand."

Armitage raised his eyebrows slightly, but made no comment.

"Detach that thing from your lip then," he said, "and help yourself to a cigarette!"

Benjamin had forgotten the smouldering remnant of tobacco that hung as usual from the corner of his mouth. He removed it and flung it into the fireplace, but by force of habit out came a packet from his pocket and he immediately lit one of his own

cigarettes instead of accepting the invitation to help himself from the box that stood on the table.

"Do you know why I have gone to the trouble of talking to you and inviting you up here ? asked Armitage.

"I suppose you are going to grant me an interview," hazarded the reporter, and he took a note-book and pencil from his pocket, and wetted the pencil on his tongue.

"Well, you're wrong — I'm not," was the emphatic reply. "You can put back that book into your pocket."

Benjamin obeyed reluctantly.

"If I ever find," went on Armitage in incisive tones, "that you have printed, or caused to be printed, anything concerning me or my doings, without my permission, you'll regret it until your dying day. Is that quite clear ?"

Mr. Shadlow nodded dumbly and the cigarette he was smoking dropped to its accustomed place on his under lip.

"Good !" approved Armitage. "I suppose you are moderately well-up in newspaper matters ?" he asked.

The reporter's pride was touched.

"I am the live wire on the *Recorder,*" he recited rapidly. "Started as a printer's apprentice; too ambitious to stop in that job; worked my way up as assistant reporter, then reporter, and now sub-editor. I have my fingers in other pies as well, and before long — "

"I did not ask you for your life's history," snapped Armitage. "Answer my questions without going into details ! I suppose you would have no difficulty in getting certain announcements printed in the daily papers — I mean important dailies, not the *Aylesbury Recorder ?"*

The live wire took the slight on his paper meekly.

"In the usual course of events I could, sir," he replied. "It all depends on the announcements. Now if you told me exactly what you required and left it all to me, I could — "

"Don't jabber ! You are here to listen, not to talk."

Benjamin licked his lips and almost flicked off the cigarette.

"I understand," he muttered.

"Then attend and don't interrupt ! I am going to put a proposition before you. I have only one ambition in life and that is to

avenge myself on those who brought about my father's death and my own degradation. In order to carry out my plans, I have engaged certain people to assist me, and whatever the cost, whatever the consequences, those plans will be accomplished. It will mean, of course, running counter to the law of this country, and will very likely end in further imprisonment for myself and my accomplices. However, I regard that as a minor detail. I propose to enlist your services in getting any announcements I wish to make published in the papers. Further you will be required to keep me well informed of the activities of the police and to do any other duties which I may assign to you. Of course I shall have to disappear but you will not be acquainted with my whereabouts, except when I desire you to be. You will have endless opportunities of betraying me, no doubt, but I am prepared to risk that and rely upon your sense of duty to me as your employer, and the remuneration I will pay you, to keep you honest. I will give you six pounds a week, and a bonus of a thousand pounds as soon as my designs have been completed."

This cold, dispassionate proposition took Mr. Benjamin Shadlow's breath away. He looked at Armitage as though he had not heard aright; as though he had awakened from a particularly vivid dream and was not quite sure whether he had been dreaming or not.

"Are you able to get away from your paper fairly frequently ?" asked Armitage.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied Benjamin with pride. "I have persuaded the boss that the only way to make a newspaper go ahead is to have a man constantly travelling round picking up information first hand, and now I spend more time out of Aylesbury than I do there. That is why I was able to come and meet you, so's to get the first chance of an interview."

"I wish you would learn to reduce your speeches by half," said Armitage disagreeably. "Well, if you accept my proposition, you can still continue your duties on your paper. I am awaiting your answer !"

"Do you think there might be any chance of me getting arrested, sir ?" asked Shadlow timidly.

"It is quite a likely contingency," was the cold reply.

For a long time Mr. Benjamin Shadlow hesitated, but the remuneration offered was too good to be refused.

"I'm your man, sir," he said at last, "and you can rely upon me to see you through. When I set my mind on a job and have a man I trust and who trusts me—" He caught a sight of Armitage's face and his voice trailed off in a whisper.

"You will see me at my house tomorrow evening at five," snapped his new employer. "And don't fail!"

"Tomorrow at five," repeated Benjamin. "I'll be there, sir, and you can bet that I'll be proximate."

"Try again!" said Armitage drily.

When Benjamin had reached his bedroom he sat on the bed and thought things over.

"Gosh!" he murmured reflectively. "I'm not sure what I've let myself in for, but six pounds a week, and one thousand jimmy o'goblins at the end of it! Stupendous! 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good,'" he murmured, and with this philosophic utterance he went to bed.

CHAPTER XI

ARMITAGE DECLARES WAR

Despite Jack Armitage's explicit instructions to Shadlow that there was to be no reception on his arrival at Clifton Hall, he found a large concourse of people awaiting him at the gates. However, he took not the slightest notice of their cheers and drove past without either looking to right or left, and the loyal gathering dispersed with many expressions of disappointment. There seemed little difference in the park, and the house itself looked exactly the same as it had done when he had glanced wistfully back at it on the day he was driven away to stand his trial in London. He soon found, however, that most of the servants were different which, of course, was only to be expected. The Hall, at Armitage's express orders, had never been closed, but the domestic staff had been reduced by half and most of these had left for some reason or other as the years passed by. Meredith, the butler, who had grown up and grown old in the service of the General; Mrs. Percival, the housekeeper; and Angus Graham, the head gardener, were the only three who had remained throughout.

With a suppressed air of excitement the faithful trio awaited the coming of their master on the terrace. They had reserved this occasion for themselves and had sent the other servants away. As the car drew up, Meredith, now a man of sixty with silver hair, ran forward and opened the door. He had prepared a speech of welcome, but the emotion at seeing his young master again, combined with the change in his appearance, practically robbed him of the power of utterance.

"Thank God, you — you are back again, sir," he managed to stammer.

"Nice of you, Meredith," returned Armitage coldly. "How are you ?"

He shook hands in a chilly manner, and greeted Mrs. Percival and Angus in the same way then, without another word, walked straight into the library and sat down. He showed no inclination to inspect the house, and told the housekeeper to make what arrangements she liked about meals, informing her that his greatest desire was to be left alone.

Back in her room the old lady burst into tears. What a homecoming, she thought, and what a terrible change had come over the light-hearted boy they had all worshipped ! She felt she could not bear her woe alone and went off to seek comfort from Meredith. She found him in his pantry with Angus Graham, both of them looking utterly gloomy and miserable. Mrs. Percival sank into a chair and wiped her eyes.

"Oh, William," she cried, "what has come over our boy ?"

"I'll tell ye what yon folks hae done, Mrs. Percival, ma'am," said Angus fiercely. "They've broken his speerit."

"It's not only that," said Meredith miserably. "He has changed altogether. I have known him since he was a little nipper and, if I had met him in the street before he had come home, I wouldn't have recognized him. His face has quite changed — it used to be so happy and carefree, and now it's stern and — and — "

He paused for a word.

"I know what you mean, William," put in Mrs. Percival. "It's cruel and hard."

"I did mean that," nodded Meredith, "although it don't seem right to think such things. I fell almost glad that the General is dead now, so that he couldn't see what we see."

"Ye dinna theenk he would hae looked like that, man, if the General ha' been still alive, do ye ?"

The sapiency of Angus appealed to the other two.

"You're right," agreed Meredith solemnly; "Sir John's death had a lot to do with the change in him. I shall never forget the expression on his face at the funeral. And now he is sitting in the chair he always used to sit in, right opposite the one where his father sat, and he is just looking and looking at the other chair. I've been in three times and he's never moved."

"What are we to do?" moaned Mrs. Percival.

"It seems to me that we'd better hae a worrd wi' the lawyer body," suggested Angus.

The other two agreed, and it was left at that.

Armitage remained sitting in the library for a considerable time before he moved. It seemed to him that he could still see his father sitting opposite to him, and he was almost afraid to move lest he spoil the illusion. Memories of the happy days of the past floated throught his mind. Incident after incident that had taken place in this library, with his father as the central character, were remembered and dwelt upon with almost sacred care. At last, with a weary sigh, he rose and went up to the old rooms which had once constituted his private apartments. Mrs. Percival and Meredith had personally looked after them, and he found everything exactly as he had left it. Old college photographs, cricket bats, books, a pipe or two, a half-filled box of cigarettes, even a dressing-gown — an old, worn favourite — was still lying across the back of the chair where he had thrown it on the last morning he had been in the room. Suddenly he realized the devotion of the two old servants, and his heart was momentarily a little softened. He very nearly felt himself wishing that he could remain in the house and just live with the memories of the past. When he next saw the butler and housekeeper, his manner, though by no means warm, was a little kinder to them.

Mr. Benjamin Shadlow arrived promptly at five, and was given certain very explicit instructions which, in his verbose way, he stated would be carried out to the last detail. He had hardly taken his departure when Mr. Renfrew was driven up. The latter had become very old and bent, and the wisps of fair hair, which had struggled for so long to retain their colour, had now entirely gone. The lawyer was practically bald, except for a few lone grey hairs above his temples. His eyesight was very bad also, and he had developed a habit of leaning forward and peering at people when talking to them.

Mrs. Percival, appointed spokeswoman by the other two, waylaid him before he could join Armitage in the library and poured out her tale of woe.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lawyer with very evident distress. "I am sorry to hear this — very sorry indeed. I thought that, when he — er — returned home, he would regain all his old spirits. I knew he had changed a very great deal, for I noticed it when — when I — er — visited him in the place where he was — er — residing."

"What can we do, sir?" asked Mrs. Percival plaintively. "We would do anything to help the poor gentleman to become himself again."

Renfrew patted her hand.

"I am sure you would," he said. "I must think the matter over and let you know. Probably time will effect a change. Take my advice and do not appear to notice any difference."

She thanked him, and he was ushered into the library. Armitage was sitting with his back to the door but did not look round.

"Good evening, Renfrew," he said tonelessly. "Come and sit down! No . . . not that chair!" he added sharply.

He rose and pushed away the chair that had been Sir John's favourite, and pulled up another.

"You've aged a good bit since I last saw you," he said. "Let me see, when was your final visit to the prison?"

Renfrew was a little shocked at the outspoken way in which his client referred to Dartmoor. He himself preferred to cloak all references to it under more pleasant-sounding titles. The lawyer felt hurt, too, by the cavalier manner in which he had been received. As he looked at his client he experienced a sense of shock. He had noticed the change in him when he had visited him at Dartmoor, but he had been wearing convict dress then; now that he was attired in the garb of respectability once more the alteration was painfully apparent.

"I last visited you," he asserted, "nearly eighteen months ago. You said that you preferred to be left entirely alone after that."

Armitage nodded grimly.

"I remember," he said, "and I suppose it saved you a good deal of unnecessary distress."

Renfrew inclined his head.

"It was always exceedingly painful," he agreed, "to visit you there. I have come today partially to tell you how delighted

I am to see you back in your own home, and partially to inform you that I have retired."

"We'll leave the first part out," observed Armitage coldly, "but I find the second part distinctly interesting. Why have you suddenly decided to retire?"

"It is by no means a sudden decision," replied the lawyer. "I would have retired two or three years ago, only I wished to have the control of your affairs entirely in my own hands. My health has not been good for some years, and I require a rest. I am close on sixty-nine, you see, and I have worked hard all my life. My son, whom you have met in the past, is now the head of the firm, and he will deal with all your affairs."

"I am sorry to hear of your decision," declared Armitage in more amiable tones than he had hitherto used. "You have been a good friend to my family, and I am very grateful to you. It is necessary that I should show my esteem by—"

"It is not necessary to show your esteem at all," protested the lawyer. "I am quite content in the knowledge that our relations, as between clients and lawyer, have always been very satisfactory."

"That is not the point," objected Armitage brusquely. "Come with me!"

Renfrew tried hard not to resent his tone, and followed him to the long dining-hall. Over the great fireplace hung a large portrait of Sir John Armitage in the full-dress uniform of the guards. It was a wonderful likeness, and had been painted at the instance of Lady Armitage just before the War. For some time the two men stood looking up at the picture, and it seemed to both of them that, despite his stern, military bearing, the General was smiling down at them.

"That portrait, I think," said Armitage quietly, "is the most precious thing I possess. That is why I am giving it to you."

Renfrew's eyes became very misty. He suddenly felt that he had been vouchsafed a view into the innermost recesses of his client's mind, and he began to understand the change that had taken place in him better than he had ever done before. With trembling hand he clutched at Armitage's sleeve.

"You cannot do it," he objected hoarsely; "you must not! I—I couldn't accept it!"

The other looked at him and, though his face was flintlike, his voice was friendly — more friendly than it had previously been.

"I want you to accept it," he stated, "and further I insist. I will send it to Town tomorrow."

Renfrew, almost in tears, made a valiant effort to express his gratitude, but was curtly checked. Armitage led the way back into the library. In absolute silence they resumed their seats.

"What are your immediate plans ?" asked the lawyer at length.

"I think it would be much better for your own peace of mind," replied Armitage harshly, "if you did not know."

Renfrew looked at him in surprise and saw something in his eyes which startled him.

"What do you mean ?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"You will know quite soon enough," was the reply. "Until then it is better that you know nothing."

"You are not intending to do anything rash, I hope ?" cried the lawyer in alarm. "You are not still nursing the ideas of vengeance of which you spoke in the court when — "

"We'll change the subject !" said Armitage abruptly.

When Renfrew left Clifton Hall an hour later, he was a deeply thoughtful and exceedingly anxious man. He made a point of going straight to his son's residence, as soon as he had reached London, and the two held a long consultation.

On the following morning Armitage paid a visit to the grave of his father, where he spent some time, after which he drove up to Town. He was away all day and looked very grim when he returned. Among other things he had discovered the address of Sir Fellowes Allen, who had retired two years before, and that of his cousin, Phillip Humphreys, now a King's Counsel and a knight. But although he had made diligent inquiries, he had been unable to find the slightest trace of the whereabouts of Mrs. Whitelaw. The next two days he was occupied in interviewing various men who came down to see him. They were mostly smartly-dressed, but flashy, and there was a furtive air about the majority of them which roused Mrs. Percival's suspicions.

"Do you know," she confided to Meredith, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if these men had been in prison and had met Mr.

Armitage there, and that they've come down here to blackmail him."

"How can they do that?" inquired the butler, "everybody knows he's been in jail."

"I wish you wouldn't make use of such expressions, William," said the housekeeper with a sniff.

"It's not any worse than prison, is it?" retorted Meredith.

Four days after his release from Dartmoor, Armitage left Clifton Hall and was away for three days. It was following his return that the public woke up one morning to find a new sensation in their morning newspapers. It was a scathing article headed *The Pitfalls of British Justice,* and occupied a column and a half. It gave a resumé of the Armitage case, and made a virulent attack on Sir Fellowes Allen and Sir Phillip Humphreys, and spoke of the witnesses for the prosecution, particularly Mrs. Whitelaw, in language, which to say the least, was very direct and unvarnished. It appeared under the name of John Armitage, and was in most of the London newspapers and in a good many of the provincial dailies. *The Aylesbury Recorder* was very proud of itself because of the fact that it was able to print simultaneously with its greater rivals.

Meredith sat down to peruse his morning *Bulletin* as soon as the service of breakfast was concluded, and almost the first thing he saw was his master's vitriolic article. He read it through carefully, then went off to find Angus to whom he handed the paper. The Scot spelt his way through it dourly, and chuckled.

"It's ma belief," he asserted, "that Mr. Armitage is no going to lie doon under his trroubles."

"It looks pretty evident," agreed Meredith, "but I don't like it, Angus. It'll only get him into more hot water."

"The puir body wants to speak oot his mind, an' I doot if there's a better place than a noospaper."

"But some of the things he's said are — what d'you call it — libellous."

"I dinna ken rightly the meaning of that worrd, but it will no hurrt Mr. Armitage, I'm thinking."

Leaving Angus still chuckling, the butler sought out Mrs. Percival He found her more of his opinion, with the result

that the two now commenced to worry afresh in case there was any more trouble in store for their beloved master.

The following day another article appeared on similar lines, but not quite so acrimonious. However it continued the attack on Sir Fellowes and Sir Phillip Humphreys, and suggested that men of their type, who did not understand the meaning of the word justice, should suffer a little of what they had been the cause of others suffering. It went on to remind the public of the threats which the author had pronounced against the two at the end of the trial, but was careful not to repeat those threats.

On the third day a shorter, but more sensational, contribution was published and, repeating one or two examples of his cross-examination by Sir Phillip Humphreys, and the remarks made by the judge in summing up, the author concluded with:

It was through the utter callousness and injustice of these two people that my father died and I was degraded. I consider that the time has come for me to act and to exact retribution. Probably the two gentlemen concerned are at present instituting, or making arrangements to institute, proceedings for slander against me. I await their actions and merely remind them that I have never forgotten what I said after my father's death. This is not a repetition of a threat, it is merely a reminder. I have suffered severely at the hands of society, why should not society suffer at my hands? This may be regarded in certain circles as a declaration of war against the community. If the police of this country are prepared to accept that hypothesis, they are at perfect liberty to do so.

The communication was again signed, *John Armitage*. Of course it created a greater sensation than ever and there were many who declared that, reading between the lines, they could see that Armitage was not only repeating his threats to the two legal gentlemen, but was also informing the world at large that he intended to wage war against society itself. What course that war would take, these knowledgeable people did not go on to say. It is certain that Armitage lost a good deal of the sympathy of those who had believed in his innocence, and there were

others who came to the conclusion that his brain had become affected by his ten years' incarceration.

Renfrew and his son made a hurried journey to Clifton Hall and implored him to give up all thoughts of vengeance. They were obviously upset by the articles that had appeared in the papers.

"I am not sure that the police haven't a case against you," said the younger man. "I made inquiries at Scotland Yard, but could learn little. I was relieved to find, however, that the whole thing was regarded as a joke by certain officers."

Armitage's eyes flashed.

"Regarded it as a joke, did they ?" he repeated harshly. "Well, they will soon learn that it is not."

Arguments and pleading were alike of no avail, Armitage proved unyielding, and eventually the two lawyers sorrowfully took their departure. As he was stepping into the car, the elder Renfrew made one more effort.

"This may end in your returning to Dartmoor," he said with a gulp. "Be guided by an old man, Armitage, and give it up. Surely the very fact that every paper that published your communication was careful to add that they took no responsibility whatever for their publication, must have shown you that you were taking a grave risk ?"

"I expected them to protect themselves," observed Armitage; and turning, he walked into the house.

He was finishing a solitary dinner when Meredith came to him trembling violently, his face as white as a sheet. He held a salver in his hand and on it was a solitary card. Armitage picked it up and read it casually.

"Show Inspector Leslie into the library, Meredith," he said, "and see that whisky and sodas are put on a side table."

The old butler left the room. Armitage finished his coffee and, glancing up instinctively at the place over the fireplace where the portrait of his father had hung, he lit a cigar and strolled along to the library.

CHAPTER XII

INSPECTOR LESLIE PAYS A CALL

Inspector Dennis Leslie was a young man of good family and education. When war broke out in 1914, he had been eighteen years of age and a prominent member of his school's O.T.C., and, with exemplary promptitude, like so many young men of the same type, he had joined up. In a remarkably short space of time he found himself at the front with a King's Commission, and proceeded to enjoy himself thoroughly. Before two years had passed, he had reached the rank of captain and was steadily progressing upwards, but his peculiar talents soon resulted in his being transferred to the Intelligence Department, and he spent the remaining two years of warfare in accomplishing work which was described on various official documents as "extremely meritorious." The result was that he received several decorations and the rank of major. When the Armistice was signed, his special attributes enabled him to join the Metropolitan Police in a position that saved him the trouble of working his way up from the lowest rung of the ladder. For some time he had been attached to the Special Branch of New Scotland Yard, but recently had been transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department.

He was a tall, athletic young man with curly brown hair, grey eyes, a straight nose, and a broad humorous mouth; while he possessed the complexion of a school girl. He was always dressed fastidiously and was reported by his comrades to pay frequent visits to Savile Row in order to hold long and serious consultations with his tailor about the shape of a pocket or the cut of a coat. This may have been exaggerated, but the fact remains that a jacket buttoned in the wrong place, a tie drawn too tight, or a

speck of dust visible on the collar, annoyed him intensely. He was the sort of man who would dress for dinner in an Indian train, crossing the Sind Desert in the middle of the hot weather.

Armitage found him examining a huge volume on Psychology when he entered the room. The detective carefully replaced the book on the shelf, and looked at the other with a boyish smile that was strangely appealing.

"So you're John Armitage, are you ?" he remarked. "Ten years for manslaughter, and now bent on obtaining another term from the kindly hands of his Majesty's judges !"

"What do you want ?" asked Armitage curtly.

"Just a little chat. You have no objection, I hope ?"

"I wouldn't have asked you in if I had," replied the other ungraciously.

He pulled up a chair and Inspector Leslie sat down. Armitage mixed two whiskies and sodas, and gave his visitor one as though he took it for granted that he would drink it. Leslie accepted it with a slight smile.

"Your hospitality is rather overpowering," he said. "It wouldn't be much use being a prohibitionist when visiting you, would it ?"

"Are you ?" inquired Armitage coldly, as he sat down.

"I certainly am not."

"Well, why talk such a lot of rot ?"

The inspector's eyebrows rose slightly. He decided that this man was going to be a difficult person to handle. Armitage was regarding him with a critical gaze.

"So you're Inspector Dennis Leslie of Scotland Yard, are you ?" he asked.

"I am," was the reply.

"I must say you've given me a surprise," commented Armitage. "Nobody would ever take you for a policeman."

"I've been told that before," said Leslie with regret. "In fact my friend Morrison informed me this morning that I looked more like a tailor's dummy than a respectable member of the police force. By the way, you know Inspector Morrison, don't you ?"

"No."

"Well, you should — he arrested you! He was only a sergeant then, but he's improved since."

Armitage scowled.

"Will you be good enough to inform me," he questioned, "why you have given me the very doubtful honour of this visit?"

"Sarcasm is quite wasted on me," replied Leslie imperturbably. "I came down to have a look at you, because I had been told to keep an eye on you. I was rather interested to know whether you're an ex-convict with a supposed grievance that might result in trouble, or merely a harmless lunatic."

Armitage stiffened.

"You'd better be careful," he warned, "or you may find out in a way that's not pleasant to yourself."

"Oh, yes; I've heard of that famous uppercut of yours. You've exploited it on several occasions with success, I believe; but there is no reason why you should try it on me. I have no warrant for your arrest, and I have no particular wish to cause you to lose your temper."

"As you have no warrant for my arrest, perhaps you'll explain the actual reason for your visit, and go!"

Leslie put down his glass and leaned towards the other. All his flippancy vanished, and he spoke earnestly.

"I studied your case very carefully," he said, "and although I personally had nothing to do with it, there were several points connected with it which intrigued me, and made me wonder if there could possibly be something behind it all. Anyhow you were sentenced and there it ended. Now look here, Armitage, I am going to speak pretty plainly. If by some chance there was a mistake in the verdict at your trial and you have suffered innocently, you are not doing yourself the slightest bit of good by writing articles in the papers, and making covert threats against society in general, and Allen and Humphreys in particular. On the contrary you are piling up a considerable amount of trouble for yourself, which might end in your doing another stretch. If you were guilty of the crime for which you were punished, then you jolly well deserved what you got and more, and you've no grouse at all. In either case, take my advice, settle down and forget it!"

"Since when," inquired Armitage sarcastically, "have Scotland Yard taken to sending officers round to act as heavy fathers to prospective criminals? Also it would interest me to know by what right you visit me here. Surely this district is under the supervision of the Aylesbury police?"

"I assure you that my call has nothing official about it. Imagine that I have come as a friend if you like. At the same time I want to warn you that your threats were made against two people resident in London, and that I have been told off to watch events and act if necessary. In fact you are my special province."

"I am honoured," murmured Armitage. "I suppose," he went on, "that in the event of anything occurring, which is contrary to the law, you will arrest me?"

"Without hesitation," replied Leslie promptly.

"Then it may interest you to know that your warnings, whether official or unofficial, have no influence upon me whatsoever. I don't care whether you follow me round like a watchdog or not — neither you nor the whole of Scotland Yard put together will succeed in interfering with my designs; certainly not before they are completed."

Leslie shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we know how we stand now, don't we?" he remarked. "I think I shall feel a certain amount of regret when I put the bracelets on you."

Armitage recoiled a little.

"You will never do that," he said between clenched teeth.

"I hope not. I would much prefer to find that you were just the harmless lunatic, and not the ex-convict with a grievance."

"Which are you inclined to favour now?" asked Armitage with a sneer.

"Oh, the harmless lunatic every time!"

An expression of angry menace suddenly appeared on Armitage's face.

"You had better clear out," he snapped.

"I'm going, but you might offer me another whisky and soda first."

Without a word the other walked across to the side table and

mixed the drink, then carried it back and gave it to the detective in the same way that he might have given a bone to a dog. The latter took the glass with a smile, but made no comment.

"Here's to a better understanding!" he said.

Armitage made no reply, but stood looking at him with a frown until he had finished the drink, then rang the bell. Leslie rose from his chair and carefully dusted his trousers.

"It's a pity you've got a kink, Armitage," he observed.

"Go to blazes!"

The door opened and Meredith entered.

"You rang, sir?" he asked.

"Show this gentleman out!" ordered his master.

"Thanks for an entertaining evening," said Leslie. "I hope the next time we meet will be as pleasant."

His unwilling host scowled but said nothing, and the inspector left the room. In the hall Meredith handed him his hat, looking at him the while with an expression of anxiety. Leslie smiled at him.

"Feeling worried?" he asked.

"It isn't my place, sir," said the old butler, "to — to take notice of things, but there isn't any danger of — of the master getting into trouble again, is there?"

"What is your name?"

"Meredith, sir."

"Well, take my advice, Meredith, and do everything you can to make him take an interest in the ordinary things of life again. He is a good man with a bad grouse, and he wants his mind transferred to something more healthy than its present obsession."

"I see, sir; thank you, sir."

He watched the detective drive away in his long low racing car, and hastened to tell Mrs. Percival what Leslie had said, feeling much happier in mind than he had done for some days.

The next day Armitage announced that he had taken a flat in Town for a few months and that he was leaving almost immediately. He was taking Meredith with him and a couple of other servants. Mrs. Percival was inclined to be tearful, but her cronies regarded the change as a good one.

"It's ma conseedered opeenion," announced Angus, "that leeving in a great toon will do him gude. It wull tak' his mind off his trroubles."

The flat was a large roomy affair on the ground floor of a house in Arlington Gardens. Its previous owner had been a man without any very great taste in furniture and decoration, but it was not long after Armitage had been installed that this deficiency was remedied. There was a narrow hall adjoining six rooms with the domestic quarters behind. The latter were reached by way of a lane running along the side of the building, which communicated with the back premises by means of a gate.

Armitage had been established for two days when he received a visitor. He was having tea when she called and was at first inclined to refuse to see her, but a woman caller was such an unexpected event that he felt intrigued and, after thinking the matter over, told Meredith to show her in. She came quickly, almost impetuously, and he rose to his feet with a start of surprise. Where had he seen those hazel eyes before, that glossy brown hair, those delicate features and wonderful complexion ? She also seemed to recognize him, and her face flushed prettily.

"Oh !" she exclaimed. "I didn't know it was you."

"You have the advantage of me, madam," he said stiffly, "though I have a feeling that we have met before."

"My name is Mary Fulcher," she declared.

"I'm afraid that conveys nothing to me."

"Don't you remember that day on Dartmoor, when — when you tried to escape and were wounded ?"

The light of recognition brightened his sombre eyes for a moment.

"Oh, yes, I remember," he said without enthusiasm. "You tried to be kind to me, I believe."

Her face fell. His tones were so cold and so studiously polite, and she had expected — well, just a little interest.

"I suppose I have changed a great deal since then," she remarked. "You see I wasn't quite seventeen, and that was seven years ago, wasn't it ?"

"You have hardly changed at all," he assured her. "May I offer you some tea ?"

"Oh, yes please. I should love it."

He drew up a chair for her, and rang for Meredith to whom he gave the necessary order. The atmosphere was rather constrained and she began to feel uncomfortable. There was something so unapproachable, almost repellent about this man. He hardly spoke a word whilst she was drinking her tea and daintily eating the deliciously toasted tea cakes he placed before her; and her own remarks were met by monosyllables.

"Do you know where I had been the day I met you ?" she asked at last, when she had finally put down her cup.

"No," he replied shortly.

"I had visited my brother," she said in a low voice.

"Oh, indeed !"

"He was in — in the prison at the time."

A flicker of interest showed in his eyes.

"Do you mean as a convict ?" he asked.

"Yes."

There was a short silence. He broke it to ask what her brother had done. She shivered.

"He had forged a cheque for a thousand pounds," she replied in a pitiful little voice. "He had become associated with — with some men who ruined him, and in order to save himself he stole a cheque belonging to my uncle and made it payable to himself above my uncle's signature. When it was found out there was terrible trouble and, in spite of my efforts to save Sydney, he was arrested and tried. My uncle prosecuted him with ruthless severity and he was sentenced to seven years penal servitude."

"Seven years !" exclaimed Armitage, interested despite himself. "That was pretty severe. Had your brother been living with his uncle ?"

"We both were. You see we were orphans and had lived under his guardianship ever since my mother and father were killed in a motor accident when I was only eight years old."

"Where did you live ?"

"At Tavistock. That is quite close to the prison, as you know, and I had obtained permission from the governor to visit Sydney the day after he arrived there. That is how I met you."

"I suppose your brother is out ?"

"Yes, he was released nearly a year ago."

"Is he going straight now ?"

"He was," she said quietly.

"What do you mean ?"

She looked up at him, and he saw something in her eyes which he did not understand.

"You ought to know," she said in a hard voice.

"I ?"

"Yes. He has confided to me that you have engaged him to help you, with others, in some design you have in mind. I tried to find out from him what it was, but he would not tell me. All I could get out of him was the stupid phrase, 'a matter of justice.' "

"I remember now," nodded Armitage. "Of course, Fulcher is one of the men who is pledged to me."

"Pledged to you !" she cried. "For what ? For some terrible scheme that will end in his going to prison again ?"

"Not necessarily," he replied. "If everything goes as it should, there will be no risk to your brother, and he will certainly benefit considerably by being associated with me."

"Benefit !" she cried scornfully. "Benefit in what way ? Oh, can't you see that you are leading him on to complete ruination — perhaps worse ? I came to you today to plead with you — to ask you to release Sydney."

"I see," said Armitage quickly.

"Listen to me, Mr. Armitage," she entreated eagerly. "When Sydney was put in prison, he was only a boy of twenty-one. His only sin was that he had been weak and easily led by others, and to save himself he fell into a great temptation. Give him his chance and let him become the man I want him to be. I know all about the terrible sorrow which afflicted you, and the revenge you swore in court on the day you were convicted. I was only a little girl at the time but I was very keen on cricket, and I had made you one of my heroes. I didn't believe in your guilt, not because I understood anything about the case, but because of your reputation. I can't feel that you were guilty now — no man would have become so bitter, if he were not innocent. You must have suffered terribly. Please think a little of others' sufferings too. My

brother is all I have, and I am so fond of him. Won't you let him alone, and give him to me ?"

"Madam," returned Armitage harshly, "your brother is his own master as far as I am concerned. I put the matter before him while we were together in Dartmoor prison. He agreed to associate himself with me, and there the matter ends. If he proposes to change his mind now, I will say nothing; but advise him to give it up, I will not."

"But don't you understand ?" she cried. "I have done my very utmost to persuade him to throw up the arrangement he had with you — I have coaxed, pleaded, implored him, but he won't ! I read your articles in the papers, and I know you mean to do something that will put you in the hands of the police again, and all those associated with you. Please have a little pity on me. I want my brother; and now that he has paid for his fault with years of imprisonment, I want him clean and wholesome, not tainted with other crimes. Tell him that you don't want him and let him be the gentleman I want him to be !"

"I dislike scenes intensely," said Armitage in cutting tones, "and, if you will pardon me, I have an appointment in half an hour. If your brother asks me to release him from his contract with me, I will make no objection, but I certainly will not make the first move. He is at perfect liberty to take part in my activities, or to give up his association with me, but I will not influence him one way or the other. That is my last word !"

She rose to her feet, and her face was very pale.

"I wish I could hate you," she declared, "but I — I can't. I don't think you are human, and all I can do is to pray that your heart will become a little softer."

Armitage bowed mockingly.

"I am sure, madam," he sneered, "that your prayers will be most efficacious."

"God have pity on you !" she cried with a sob, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

LESLIE JOINS A MEETING

As Mary Fulcher reached the end of Arlington Gardens she saw an immaculate-looking individual strolling towards her. He was such a picture of sartorial magnificence that she could not help staring a little at him. To her surprise he raised his hat and stood to await her coming.

"Miss Fulcher, isn't it?" he asked pleasantly.

"It is," she replied with chilly politeness, "but I have no recollection of having met you before."

"You haven't," he observed coolly; "at least I don't think so. My name is Leslie."

"I am not interested," she said with a flash of her fine eyes.

"You soon will be," he remarked. "May I stroll a little way with you? I have something to say."

"If you do not let me pass," she warned him ominously, "I will call a policeman."

"Why call one, when I am standing in front of you?"

"You are not — are not — "

"I am," he said. "I should have introduced myself fully. Let me repair the deficiency now."

He handed her a card, which she glanced at mechanically, then, with eyes in which there showed a slight trace of fear, she looked up at him.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"I am seeking information," he replied, "and I think you can supply me with it. Shall we move on?"

This time she made no objection and they walked on together towards Hyde Park Corner. He made no attempt to engage

her in conversation, however, until they had reached the entrance to the Green Park.

"I wonder if you would mind sitting in the Park with me for a few minutes ?" he asked. "It is so noisy here that one could not possibly talk in comfort."

She made no demur, and he selected a seat under a large shady oak. For a few seconds there was silence, then he spoke.

"Did you get what you wanted ?" he asked.

She stared at him.

"What do you mean ?" she demanded.

"Well, I may be wrong, but I don't think I am. Am I correct in assuming that you visited Mr. Armitage in order to get him to make a certain promise about your brother ?"

She felt really afraid now.

"How did you know ?" she asked quickly.

"I didn't — I merely guessed," he replied. "But it was more or less a simple matter of putting two and two together. I know that Armitage is plotting something, and that half-a-dozen ex-convicts, who were in the jug — I beg your pardon — in the prison with him, have lately paid somewhat furtive visits to his house in Bucks. One of those men was your brother. Now I happened to be strolling round near Arlington Gardens this afternoon, and a man I have put on to keep a fatherly eye on Armitage's flat, told me that a young lady had gone in. That interested me, so I waited until you came out, then recognized you."

"How did you know who I was ?"

"I made a point, when I saw your brother with a very pretty girl, of finding out all about her."

He spoke so naturally that she found it impossible to be offended.

"Now there are one or two questions I want to ask you," he went on. "I hope you will answer them."

"It all depends," she replied.

"Of course it does," he agreed heartily, "and, believe me, I do not want you to answer anything that you would rather not."

"I shouldn't !"

He looked at her with a twinkle in his eye.

"No; I don't believe you would," he commented. "First of all

then, am I right in supposing that Fulcher is associating himself with Armitage, and that you visited the latter today to beg him to release your brother ?"

"What will that question lead to ?" she asked.

"What do you mean ?"

"Supposing I reply to it, would you be likely to use my reply in any way to the detriment of either my brother or Mr. Armitage ?"

"No; at least not directly."

"Ah ! Then you really are expecting me to give you information which may lead to their eventual arrest."

"I couldn't truthfully say no."

"Please refrain from asking me any further questions, Mr. Leslie," she said disdainfully. "I assure you that I have no intention of answering them."

"I begin to admire you more and more," he admitted.

"And remarks like that are in bad taste," she added.

He apologized humbly, then went on.

"So far you have given me the information I wanted," he said, "now there is — "

"What do you mean ?" she demanded. "I have not answered your question !"

"Not actually perhaps," he acknowledged, "but quite enough to satisfy me."

She turned towards him impulsively.

"Mr. Leslie," she complained, "why do you people keep on watching a man when he has once gone wrong ? It isn't fair ! My brother was only a boy when he committed the crime which put him in a convict prison, and he would never have been prosecuted had it not been for the harshness and cruelty of my uncle. And I feel sure that Mr. Armitage was innocent of the crime for which he was punished. Why not leave them alone and give them a chance ?"

"My dear child," he rejoined with a fatherly air, "I am not watching Armitage's movements in order to get a chance to arrest him again. I believe in his innocence as much as you, and I am hanging round in the hope that I will be able to prevent him from ruining himself altogether."

"Do you really mean that ?" she asked.

"I do. It is true that I was appointed by the Commissioner to watch him and report if his newspaper communications were merely hot air, or if he really did mean trouble. I am convinced that he is up to something, but if I possibly can I'll save him from it."

"I am awfully glad to hear you say that."

He looked at her curiously.

"Did you know him before ?" he queried.

She coloured a little.

"I met him seven years ago," she said; "on the day he escaped and was recaptured."

"I see. You must have been very young then."

"I was sixteen. I had been to visit my brother — he arrived in Dartmoor the day before — and as the car passed a group of convicts about a mile from the village, Mr. Armitage broke away and jumped on."

"So yours was the famous car — I remember hearing about that. You ditched it and enabled Armitage to be recaptured, didn't you !"

"I didn't," she protested indignantly; "the driver did !"

"You mean to say that you would have helped him to get away ?"

"If I could have done — yes !"

Leslie smiled.

"There is the making of a law-breaker in you, young lady," he remarked.

"I hope not," she said seriously.

"Well," he observed, "as you have no intention of answering any more questions, I won't ask them. You have satisfied me that my conjectures are right and that will do for the present. Now I suggest that we might combine in an attempt to bring this idiot of a man to his senses. What do you say ?"

"What can I do ?" she asked. "I'm afraid I was not very successful when I asked him to release my brother a little while ago, and — "

He put back his head, and laughed heartily.

"Thanks for the direct answer," he said.

She blushed a little and bit her lip.

"What a little fool I am !" she cried with real concern.

"Don't worry !" he rejoined. "It doesn't matter. You see, I had already satisfied myself on that point. . . You may perhaps be able to do much more than anybody to prevent Armitage from carrying out his designs. See him as often as you can — it should be possible to make your brother the excuse — and perhaps you'll succeed in bringing him round. I'll watch every movement of his and endeavour to step in before he can do anything. Do you agree ?"

"Yes," she agreed eagerly.

"Good ! You must remember, though," he added with a sterner note in his voice, "that if he does carry out his schemes, I shall arrest him and everyone concerned with him, if it is a matter of breaking the law."

She nodded. A few minutes later he escorted her to Hyde Park Corner.

"You don't live with your uncle now ?" he asked, as they walked along.

"No. He died two years ago, and left me all his money. I have a flat in Hampstead, but you know that."

"Yes, I know that," he assented.

He watched her climb on to the top of an omnibus, then raised his hat and strolled away.

At ten o'clock the same night he again appeared in that neighbourhood and made his way along Arlington Gardens until he was opposite Armitage's residence. Here he was met by a short man who saluted him respectfully.

"Anything to report, Meadows ?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "I've counted four men going into the flat." Then suddenly he pulled his companion behind an old cabman's shelter which stood conveniently by. "Here come two more !" he announced.

He was wrong, as the men in question passed the house and went on, but almost immediately behind them came two more, who entered the building and could be seen standing outside the door of Armitage's flat. They were admitted almost at once.

"This grows interesting," murmured Leslie. "I wonder how I can get in without being observed."

"There's a way in the back gate, sir," said the detective, "and through the domestic part of the flat."

"What about the servants ?"

"They've gone out — went about half an hour ago."

"H'm ! He's sent them out of the way apparently. Well, I'm going to get in and find out what the meeting's about. You hang on here !"

"Very well, sir. What about a revolver ?"

"I shan't want a weapon, thanks. As a matter of fact I'm going to commit a felony and you'd better keep quiet about it. I've no right to burgle his flat — he may be giving a perfectly harmless supper party."

The detective grinned to himself. He had worked with Inspector Leslie before. The latter walked quietly along the lane and tried the gate. It was open and, raising the latch carefully, he glided inside. It was still quite light and it was comparatively easy work, therefore, to find his way across the small yard to the back door.

"A most convenient flat, this," he muttered, as he gently turned the handle of the door.

To his surprise it gave, and he hesitated a moment before trusting himself to the darkness within. It was very careless of the servants, he thought, to go out and leave the door unlocked. Then he smiled to himself at the reflection that Armitage was a poor conspirator to overlook such an important detail. He judged that he was in a small kitchen, and with his hands stretched out in front of him for fear of knocking something over, he cautiously tip-toed across the floor until he felt himself against a wall. Following this round he came to another door which was also opened in perfect silence. Looking out he discovered a dimly-lit passage. On his right-hand side were three doors all closed, and at the end of the passage on his left hung a curtain which obviously separated the domestic quarters from the rest of the flat. He made his way noiselessly as far as the curtain and, lifting a small fold, found that he was gazing into a brilliantly lighted hall. For some moments he stood in deep thought. There were five doors on the left hand side of the hall, and he wondered which one he should choose in order to be able to get

into an apartment adjoining the front room, from where came a subdued hum of voices. Making up his mind suddenly he chose the second as being the most obvious one, and a few moments later had established himself safely in what was obviously a dining-room. The place was in darkness but was connected with the drawing-room by sliding doors which stood ajar. Heavy portières hung on either side, and Leslie found ample space to hide himself behind one of these, with the additional advantage of being able to hear every word of the conversation that was going on.

Armitage was speaking.

"Now that our plans are definitely made," he was saying, "there is no reason whatever why we should delay any longer, and to tell you the truth the sooner everything is over the better I shall be pleased. I have waited ten years for the opportunity that is in my hands today, and I intend to take full advantage of it. I don't think we can do better than to start by dealing with Inspector Leslie of Scotland Yard."

There was a murmur of approval and the detective gave an involuntary start. What did Armitage mean by talking about dealing with him; what had he done and what — ! His meditations were rudely interrupted. The sliding doors opened suddenly, the curtain was drawn aside, and before he quite realized what had happened he had been dragged into the drawing-room and pushed into a chair. For a moment he blinked owlishly on account of the sudden change from darkness to light, but as his eyes became accustomed to the brilliance, he gazed curiously round him.

Six men, all of whom he knew by sight and in one or two cases even more intimately, were standing close to his chair looking down at him, and in every face was an expression of hostility. A little in the background stood Armitage, his eyes grimly fixed on his captive and his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets.

"You fool," he remarked in icy tones; "did you think we were children to allow you to creep into this house and listen to our conversation ? Did you think that you were unobserved outside the house, and not only tonight, but last night and a good many times yesterday and today ? Did you imagine that your phleg-

matic jackals had passed unnoticed ? It may interest you to know that we expected you — we unlocked the back door to make it easier for you to enter, and you were observed from the moment you left the shelter of the curtain at the end of the hall until you hid in the dining-room."

"I seem to have underrated you," murmured Leslie composedly. "What are you going to do with me now that you have me ?"

"That remains to be seen," retorted Armitage. "You realize, I suppose, that you have broken into my flat burglariously and that you are liable to be charged with felony ?"

"How do you know that I haven't a search warrant ?"

"Of course you haven't," sneered Armitage.

"No; I haven't, as a matter of fact."

"It would look nice for a detective inspector of New Scotland Yard to be tried for burglary. I am almost inclined to hand you over to the police."

Leslie laughed.

"Delightful !" he commented. "You would have the most unique collection of witnesses against me that ever appeared in a police court. Just think of them answering to their names and professions — 'Curly' Summers, car thief; Steve Hardy, specialist in jewellery; Mike Thompson, robbery with assault; 'Frenchy' Smith, tony man; Sydney Fulcher, forgery; Dan Freeman, bank robbery. 'Pon my word, Armitage, with the exception of Fulcher, who has only made one break and probably has quite a lot of good in him yet, you've collected the finest assortment of scoundrels outside the Scrubbs."

"Oh, cut it out !" said "Frenchy" Smith, a tall, powerfully built fellow with glistening black eyes and protruding teeth. "You always were a good man with the jaw box, weren't you ?"

"I was, Frenchy," agreed Leslie, with a smile. "I talked you into a bit of a muddle in twenty-two, didn't I ?"

"Curse you, shut up !"

"I am glad you know my — er — friends," said Armitage, rather defiantly it seemed. "You will realize, therefore, that I meant what I said, and no longer regard me as a harmless lunatic."

"I realize also that I shall know whom to lay my hands on when it comes to beating you all up."

Two or three of them looked uneasily at one another. One, a fair-haired, good-looking young fellow, who seemed strangely out of place in that motley collection, visibly paled and shrank back. He was Sydney Fulcher, Mary's brother. Armitage noticed his distress, and a look of contempt came into his face.

"Well," he said impatiently, "you've caught a spy, you fellows. What do you propose doing with him ?"

"Best thing to do," growled Thompson, a bull-necked, square-jowled, truculent-looking man, "is to hit him on the head. He can't tell tales then. What you wanted to bring him in here for beats me — he knows who we are now and who to look for when — "

"Be quiet !" snapped Armitage harshly. "You're being paid well, so what have you to grumble at ?"

"There wasn't no need fer 'im ter see us, was there ?" asked a small, thin, weazel of a man who, from his whole get-up, showed that he was of the *gamin* type of thief. "Wot I wants ter know is: are we expected ter take the dibs yer promised us an' then cool our 'eels in clink fer the rest of our nat'ral ?"

Armitage's face was unpleasant to see. His lips came together in a thin line and he glared at his questioner with such a baleful look that "Curly" Summers wished heartily that he had kept quiet.

"If you don't like it," he snarled, "you can clear out. You know our contract, and if I am willing to face the risks, why aren't you ? You're going to make money out of it, while I make nothing and take the onus. And I'm known — I've taken jolly good care that I *am* known. If a tuppenny-halfpenny detective inspector suspects you of being an accessory, why should you worry. If you can't evade capture, then all I can say is that you deserve to be taken."

"Mr. Armitage is right, Curly," put in Steve Hardy who, apart from Fulcher, was the most gentlemanly-looking member of the sextette. "You've got no grumble."

"Orl right, Mr. Armitage," said Summers sulkily, "no 'arm meant."

Armitage turned from him in apparent disgust. Leslie was impressed by the fact that these men treated their leader with more respect than he had ever seen crooks treat anybody.

"Now that the little quarrel is over," he remarked pleasantly, "I wish you would make up your minds what to do with me. By the way, Armitage, am I the tuppenny-halfpenny detective to whom you referred just now ?"

"You are !" snapped Armitage.

"You've made a big mistake in antagonizing the police," said Leslie reprovingly, "on the eve of your criminal career; and nothing antagonizes them as much as a remark like that."

"Do you think I care about the police ? You'll soon find that I hold all the tricks in my hand."

"Not if hearts are trumps," was the laconic reply.

"What the devil do you mean ?"

"Subtlety was always a weakness of mine — wrap a damp towel round your head and think it over !"

"For God's sake get rid of him !" exclaimed Armitage.

Willing hands laid hold of the detective, but the millionaire still had something to say. His eyes held the inspector's in a long fierce glare.

"Remember this, Leslie," he warned. "I have made up my mind to do — what I am going to do, and neither you nor the whole police force will stop me. Afterwards — well, you can do what you like with me. But if you get in my way, or interfere with my plans, I'll break you as I would a piece of stick."

The detective returned look for look and replied in a similar tone.

"You're making an almighty mistake," he said. "You may have been hard hit, but that is no excuse for you to take the law into your own hands, and I'm jolly sure that your father, if he could communicate with you — "

"Don't dare mention my father !" cried Armitage hoarsely.

Leslie held up his hand.

"I repeat," he continued deliberately, "that if your father could, he would stop you from taking the course you apparently propose to take. In spite of your threats, I am going to do my utmost to save you from yourself. If I can't, and you do carry out your

intentions, then I swear that I will put you back where you have been for the last ten years or, if things are taken to the limit, put a noose round your neck. I am speaking as man to man, Armitage, and I mean what I say. You're too good a fellow to be allowed to go to the devil, but if I can't stop you, then I'll hang you for murder, or put you in Dartmoor for whatever other crime you contemplate. I might add for your information that your intended victims are being well guarded."

His eyes still held the other's and gradually Armitage, though clenching his jaws, allowed his to drop. The six crooks had drawn apart in an uneasy group and were watching the detective and their leader with expressions of alarm. Leslie swung round and looked straight at Fulcher.

"If you take my advice," he observed calmly, "you'll clear out. This is not the sort of environment you were intended for."

Armitage had recovered himself.

"Throw this chatterer out," he shouted; "and let us be rid of him !"

Five pairs of hands immediately gripped the detective, who submitted philosophically. He was rushed into the hall, out of the door, and thence to the front of the house. A second later the five crooks, with a hearty swing, had flung him into the road. Leslie picked himself up slowly as his subordinate ran across to his assistance.

"Are you hurt, sir ?" asked the latter anxiously.

"No; I don't think so," replied the inspector slowly; "but I'm afraid this suit has been ruined."

CHAPTER XIV

SIR FELLOWES ALLEN FEELS REMORSE

Sir Fellowes Allen was inclined to be irritable. He walked up and down the study of his house in Belgrave Square, a frown on his pale, effeminate face, his hands clenched tightly behind his back. Sir Phillip Humphreys sat in a deep leather armchair and regarded him with a smile. They had dined together and were now engaged in discussing the possibility of Armitage, the ex-convict, endeavouring to carry out his threats. The retired judge had altered very little during the past ten years. His face was even paler and more womanly than ever, but there was scarcely a line or wrinkle to denote that he was approaching the allotted span. Even his hair was only grey in patches. Humphreys, on the other hand, had aged considerably: his hair and eyebrows were grey, while his eyes had the weary expression generally restricted to an old man. He had also lost a lot of his good looks, the healthy ruddiness of his face having turned to an unhealthy sallow. A stranger looking at the two men for the first time would probably have mistaken Humphreys for the elder, instead of well over twenty years the judge's junior.

"It is a lot of absurd nonsense," snapped Sir Fellowes. "I have been threatened from the dock a dozen times but nothing has happened to me. Why should Scotland Yard get alarmed by this newspaper activity of a fool like Armitage? The best thing they can do is to have him certified and sent to a lunatic asylum."

"Then you think his brain has gone?" queried Humphreys.

"I certainly do. I feel certain he lost his reason when his father died."

"If that is your theory, isn't it likely that as a madman he might be more dangerous than if he were sane?"

Sir Fellowes interrupted his perambulation, and fixed his piercing gaze on his companion:

"There is something in that," he admitted.

"Perhaps the police are of the same opinion and that is why they are taking such precautions."

"It seems to me," growled the judge, "that they are more intent on preventing him from committing himself than they are on protecting us."

"It amounts to the same thing," said Humphreys.

"I disagree with you. This morning I had that popinjay of a detective here — what is his name ?"

"Do you mean Inspector Leslie ?"

"I do. Everytime I see the man I feel an inclination to throw ink over him — anything to make him look untidy — "

Humphreys laughed.

"He was here this morning," went on Sir Fellowes, "and he actually had the temerity to tell me that he was more concerned about keeping Armitage from breaking the law than of actually protecting you and me from the man."

"Did he really say that in so many words ?" asked Sir Phillip with interest.

"He certainly did."

"What did you say ?"

"Say ! I did not say a word to him but I went straight to the telephone and repeated his remark to the Commissioner at Scotland Yard."

"That means a wigging for Leslie."

"Does it !" snorted Sir Fellowes irascibly. "You're quite wrong. The Commissioner said that Leslie was perfectly correct, as the first duty of the police was to prevent crime !"

Humphreys threw back his head and laughed.

"Excuse my amusement," he observed when his merriment had subsided. "I begin to understand now why you are so irritable."

"You have a distorted sense of humour, Humphreys," said the judge. "But it isn't that alone that has annoyed me. It is the fact that I am continually followed about wherever I go by a policeman in plainclothes, and the knowledge that there is one outside my house day and night."

"I am undergoing the same experience," observed Sir Phillip, "but I don't mind it. After all what annoyance does it cause ?"

"I dislike it intensely. Whether Armitage is sane or otherwise, I am quite capable of looking after myself. And there is another thing: why should the police interfere when quite a proportion of my sympathies are with Armitage ?"

A look of astonishment came over Humphreys' face.

"Your sympathies are with Armitage ?" he repeated in incredulous tones.

Sir Fellowes nodded and threw himself into a chair. He carefully selected a cigar from a cabinet by his side, and lit it.

"Yes," he said, when the weed was drawing to his satisfaction. "I had the name before I retired of being the severest judge of my day; lately I have come to the conclusion that the title was well deserved. I have a complete file of all my cases and, during my leisure, I have had ample time to go through them again. Four of my judgments stand out as examples of unnecessary severity to my mind — one was that of Morgan, whom I sentenced to death at Winchester; another Armitage; another young Fulcher whom I tried at Exeter; and the other that young Army officer, Gibbons."

Humphreys looked at him curiously.

"Are you of the opinion now," he asked, "that Armitage was not guilty ?"

"Oh, no. I don't think there could possibly be any doubt of his guilt, but he must have received intense provocation, and I have come to the conclusion that he was mistaken for some other fellow who was Mrs. Whitelaw's lover. You see, Humphreys, when one can sit down in one's study and review these things they are apt to appear in a different light."

"I am astonished to hear you speak like this," said Sir Phillip. "I always thought you were absolutely convinced that he was a thorough waster."

"So I was — at the time," returned the judge. "I am not now. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why I dislike this police protection. Armitage had two terrible shocks within a couple of minutes of each other, enough to make any man swear vengeance — one was the sentence of ten years penal servitude, the other the death of his father. I feel morally guilty of Sir John Armitage's

death and cannot feel it in my heart to blame the son for desiring to make me suffer."

"Good God !" exclaimed Sir Phillip. "What will you say next ? Why, when those communications appeared in the papers you were like a maniac in your anger, and now you sit there waxing emotional."

"I certainly was angry when I read the articles. It was natural that I should be. I am angry about them now. But I was not annoyed at what he said about me; it was because he had his remarks published so that all the world could read them."

"You have instructed your lawyers about the action for slander, I suppose ?"

"Not yet. In fact it depends upon circumstances whether I take action at all."

"What circumstances ?"

"This promised vengeance. If Armitage really means to carry out his threat, I am rather interested to see what form his revenge will take."

"At the time of the trial he said, 'I'll get you,' obviously meaning that he contemplated murder. In any case you won't have an opportunity of finding out what he intends to do, as the police will arrest him if he attempts anything."

"Damn the police !" muttered Sir Fellowes with emphasis. "I think you're entirely wrong about his attempting murder," he went on. "He is not of the stuff of which murderers are made. But what about you ?"

Humphreys laughed.

"I rather fancy," he said, "that my punishment was to take the form of something more prolonged and painful." He rose to his feet. "Bah !" he ejaculated. "What a lot of inanity it is ! I think you're right; he deserves to be shut up in a lunatic asylum."

"You are not gifted," murmured the judge cuttingly, "with a superabundance of cousinly feeling, are you ? Personally I think you deserve all with which he threatens you."

Sir Phillip's face became dark with anger.

"I hardly expected remarks like that from you," he snapped. "I suppose," he added with a sneer, "that it is all due to this new

sanctimony which has suddenly enveloped you. . . Well, it is getting late — I must go !"

"I trust that you will reach home safely," observed Sir Fellowes quietly. "It is a lucky thing that there is no Lady Humphreys to spend anxious hours worrying about her threatened spouse."

Humphreys took a grim-looking weapon from his pocket and held it in his hand.

"What ! A revolver !" exclaimed the judge. "I believe you're afraid !"

"Not afraid," was the reply, "but ready to protect myself if necessary."

When his guest had gone, Sir Fellowes Allen sat smoking until it was long after midnight. At last he rose with a sigh and went to bed. He undressed slowly, and every now and then stopped in a listening attitude, but there was not a sound except the distant conglomeration of noises that always disturb the London night, and he eventually got into bed and switched off the reading lamp. He fell into a light slumber and began to dream. Suddenly he was awake again, and sat up with all his faculties on the alert. He could have sworn that he had heard a noise. Several minutes passed by and he began to think that he had been dreaming, when there came a soft creak. At once he switched on the light by his bed and, although its softly shaded radiance only threw a glow round the head of the bed, he was dimly able to distinguish objects in the far corners of the room. He could see nothing out of the ordinary and there was certainly no sign of an intruder, but the door was obviously ajar, and he distinctly remembered closing it.

Crossing to a dressing-table, he softly opened a drawer and extracted a revolver which he had kept there of late; then, with cautious footsteps, he tiptoed to the door, suddenly flung it wide open, and stepped out into the corridor. There was no-one there. He stood listening for a minute or two, after which he re-entered the room, put on a dressing-gown and a pair of slippers, and set off to search the building.

Everywhere he went he switched on the lights until the house was brilliantly illuminated, but although he made an exhaustive examination of every room, he failed to find any signs of a mid-

night visitor. The front and side doors were locked and barred, and the lower windows latched, and satisfied at last that he must have been mistaken, he retraced his steps to his bedroom, switching off the lights on his way.

He entered and this time locked the door. He crossed the room and placed the revolver on the bedside table within easy reach of his hand.

"I must be getting nervous or old, or both," he muttered to himself irritably, "but I'm sure I closed that door and there certainly was a creak."

Suddenly he heard a swish, his head seemed to split in two, flashes of fire were dancing round him, and he felt himself falling through space. He crumpled up on the floor and lay still.

When he recovered consciousness it was a considerable time before he remembered what had happened. His head was aching abominably and it caused him excruciating agony to open his eyes. However, by the exercise of his will-power he did open them and keep them open, and gradually the pain subsided. It was pitch dark and, for a long time, he was unable to guess where he was. He was lying on something hard and uncomfortable which appeared to be moving, but it was a strange irregular sort of motion unlike anything he ever remembered to have experienced before, and it puzzled him. There was someone close by, for he could distinctly hear the sound of heavy breathing. He made an attempt to move in order to ease his aching back but obtained no relief. His hands were tied together and he presently discovered that his feet had been treated in a similar fashion. A delightful breeze every now and then fanned his cheeks and eased his throbbing head. Suddenly it dawned on him that he was lying in the bottom of an open boat. He began to speculate on his situation and wonder what was to be done with him. Obviously he was in the hands of Armitage and he felt, therefore, that he could not expect a very pleasant fate. He would almost have preferred death, he decided. After all he was an old man and loved his ease, and any rough treatment or privation would be more insufferable than death. He made another effort to move and succeeded in rolling himself over onto

his side. There was a grunt above him and a lantern was flashed into his face.

"The ole bloke's come to, Frenchy," said a voice.

"It's about time too," remarked someone gruffly from the other end of the boat. "He's been dippy for two hours. Stick your foot in his mouth if he starts singing out."

"I wish them others would turn up," the other complained. "It's blinkin' cold and it'll be getting light soon. We've been 'anging abaht 'ere for too bloomin' long fer my fancy."

"Oh, shut your jaw!" growled the man called "Frenchy," "they'll be here soon."

Sir Fellowes understood now why there was no creaking of oars in the rowlocks. The boat he was in was apparently standing by somewhere waiting to be met by another craft. He made a rapid calculation and came to the conclusion that he could not be very far from London if he had only been unconscious for two hours. Suddenly the fellow at the other end of the boat gave a hoarse warning.

"Get down, Curly," he muttered, "and shove your hand over the old chap's trap! Here comes that darned patrol launch again."

The judge felt a heavy body fall on him and his mouth was covered by a rough hand. He thought he heard the sound of a motor boat, and there was a dim radiance of light, then everything became silent again and the darkness seemed thicker than ever. The man lying on top of him and the hand over his mouth combined almost to suffocate him, and it was with a sense of intense relief that he felt the fellow rise after what had seemed an eternity.

As he did so Sir Fellowes again heard the staccato sound made by the engine of a motor launch, and it seemed to be coming nearer. He began to pluck up courage in the hope that it was the patrol boat coming back, but suddenly the noise of the motor stopped and there was a soft whistle immediately answered by his guardian. A minute later there was a bump and the sound of a rope being thrown on board.

"Got it?" asked a voice.

"Yes," replied the man addressed as "Frenchy," then: "All right, go ahead!"

Immediately recommenced the drone of the motor, and Sir Fellowes felt the boat he was in moving rapidly through the water. He calculated that they must have been on the move for a good hour before they stopped again and dawn had broken apparently, for it was beginning to grow quite light. They ran alongside a vast shape that loomed above them and the judge felt a tremor of fear. Were they about to put him on a ship that would convey him to some desolate spot thousands of miles away from where perhaps he would never have any chance of returning? He shivered with apprehension and suddenly discovered that he was icy cold. It was then that he realized that he was only clad in pyjamas and a thin dressing-gown.

"Have you got him?" called a voice from above.

"Of course!" replied Frenchy.

"Bring him up then!"

The judge felt himself lifted and flung over a man's shoulder like a sack of potatoes. He was carried upwards by gradual stages, then thrown on the deck with such force that it shook every bone in his body. For a moment or two he lay half stunned.

"Be careful, Frenchy!" said someone. "You'll kill him if you throw him about like that.

"What does it matter?" returned Frenchy with a rough laugh. "He'd probably like that better than what's going to happen to him."

"Cut it out!" commanded the other voice sharply. "Here, Mike, take him down and lock him up in that old lamp room!"

Sir Fellowes was lifted again, conveyed down some steps, and thrust into an evil-smelling hole. He heard the door being closed and locked, then the receding footsteps of the man who had carried him there. He lay where he had been thrown, feeling that a fate worse than he could ever have imagined had overtaken him. There was not a vestige of light in the place and the air was so foul that before long he began to feel sick and dizzy. He heard the soft scamper of feet, too, and guessed there were rats about, a supposition that was confirmed a moment later when he felt something run over him. As best he could he dragged himself along until he came up against what was obviously a coil of rope and, raising the upper part of his body, he sat leaning against

it. It seemed to him that he remained in that position for hours, fighting to prevent himself from fainting and feeling all the time that he would die if he were left there much longer. Eventually sheer exhaustion, and the trials he had been through, overcame him and he rolled over fast asleep.

He was awakened by the noise of the door being unlocked; apparently the key was rusty, or did not fit very well, for it was some time before it turned. A man came in carrying a lantern, and he proceeded to untie the judge's feet and hands. That done the latter was gruffly told to get up and accompany the other, but his legs had become numbed and he was scarcely able to move them. The fellow saw the plight he was in and, putting an arm round him, helped him. They walked along an alleyway, and presently came to a ladder which apparently led to the upper deck, for a glorious shaft of sunlight was streaming down. Up this they went and Sir Fellowes Allen was greatly astonished to find himself on an old dismantled hulk which one day, perhaps, had been a fine sailing ship. A glance over the side showed him that she was lying in the mud off as desolate a looking shore as he had ever seen in his life. Apparently the motor boat had come alongside when the tide was up, for there was no water within fifty yards of the derelict now.

He was not given much time to inspect his surroundings, however, his companion hurrying him aft until they came to the remains of the poop. Here he was pushed in a doorway and stood still with astonishment. He found himself in an elegantly furnished room which showed none of the decay that was so ostensible everywhere else. The walls had been lined with oak panelling, the floor was covered with a soft carpet and a large desk stood under the stern window. Several graceful-looking chairs were disposed in convenient positions and silken curtains hung over two other doors, leading apparently into compartments on opposite sides of the room. A small side table, replete with wines and spirits, occupied a place on the right hand side of the chamber, and a smoker's cabinet completed the furniture.

A man was seated at the desk studying a large book. As Sir Fellowes entered, however, he looked up and surveyed his prisoner with a cold, deliberate stare.

"So you are in my power at last, Allen," he said. "I have waited for this moment ever since my father's death and now I have you where I want you !"

"And what do you intend doing with me ?" asked Sir Fellowes with entire composure.

"Sit down and I will tell you," replied Armitage.

Sir Fellowes Allen sat down.

CHAPTER XV

ARMITAGE WINS THE FIRST TRICK

Inspector Leslie had had a late night, and he was very much annoyed, therefore, when he found himself wide awake before six o'clock in the morning. He shut his eyes and tried to get another forty winks, as he put it, but all desire to sleep had apparently forsaken him and, after twisting and turning for some time, he jumped out of bed and shouted for his bath. He lived in a small service flat in Maida Vale, and was surrounded by actresses like the juvenile lead in a musical comedy surrounded by the chorus. There were actresses living on either side of him, an actress in the flat above his and two on the other side of the road. It was not because of a particular regard for ladies of the theatrical professional that he had come to live in their midst, but the apartments happened to be the most suitable he could find, both from the point of view of his pocket and of convenience, at the time that he had been searching for a home, and he had stayed there ever since.

His man, an ex-soldier, who was batman, chauffeur if necessary, cook when required, and general handyman, appeared at the door of the bedroom with tousled head and in a state of *déshabillé*. He was a small man with a pug nose and an aggressive chin.

"Did you say bath, sir ?" he inquired in tones of amazed wonder.

"I did," replied Leslie. "Is it so unusual for me to call for a bath ?"

"No, sir, but I think you've made a mistake hin the time. It's honly ten to six and you didn't go to bed huntil half past two."

"Go and get the bath ready and don't argue ! And I should like a cup of tea, if you feel equal to boiling a kettle."

"Right you hare, sir," said the handyman cheerfully.

Ten minutes later Leslie was splashing to his heart's content, and whistling snatches from a light opera with more volume than tune, when the telephone bell rang. He interrupted the musical performance to swear.

"You'll jolly well have to wait," he muttered.

But the bell went on ringing loudly, insistently, and eventually he shouted to his man to answer it. The beauty of his flat was that he could be heard from one corner to the other when he gave tongue — he could generally be heard in other flats as well, much to the annoyance of the aforesaid young ladies; but that never bothered him.

Presently there was a rap on the bathroom door.

"The Yard is hon the 'phone, sir," came the batman's voice.

"Is it ?" said Leslie facetiously. "Well, take it off."

"I told them that you were hin your bath, sir, but they said the matter was of great hurgency."

"Damn the Yard !" said the inspector with emphasis.

"Quite so, sir."

Leslie wrapped himself in a bath towel and went into the bedroom, where the telephone was installed. He picked up the receiver resentfully and gave his name, but at once a tense expression crept over his face as he listened gravely to what the man at the other end had to say; then with a sharp reply, he rang off and dashed back to the bathroom.

"Hawkins," he shouted, "my clothes — quick !"

He hardly stopped to dry himself before he was back in the bedroom putting on the clothes his man handed to him. Then he gulped down the hot tea which had been prepared and, picking up a hat, dashed out of the flat, down the short flight of stairs and into the street. The garage, where he kept his car, was only just round the corner, and in a couple of minutes he was breaking the speed limit on his way to Belgrave Square.

He drew up before Sir Fellowes Allen's house and found an agitated plainclothes man awaiting him with an anxious group of servants hovering in the background. He marshalled them all into the library and closed the door.

"Now then," he said, "tell me what happened."

"I came on duty, sir," promptly replied the officer, "at twelve o'clock. At or about one I was walking up and down outside the house, when suddenly three men pounced on me and, although I made a fight of it, they got me down and bound and gagged me. Then they laid me against the railings on the other side of the road where no light was reflected, and one stayed to guard me while the other two went off. A large motor car drove up soon afterwards and in about twenty minutes the two came back. I was carried into the house and put in this room. Just about six o'clock one of the servants came along and released me. We went up to Sir Fellowes Allen's room, sir, and found no trace of him."

"Of course you didn't," snapped Leslie. "What did you do then ?"

"Rang up the Yard, sir."

"Why didn't you ring me up direct ?"

"Thought it safest to telephone to headquarters, sir."

"How did these fellows get in ?"

"Opened a kitchen window, sir — I found marks showing that the catch had been forced."

"And I told him to have a burglar alarm fitted," groaned Leslie.

"There's a note for you in the bedroom, Mr. Leslie," announced the detective.

"H'm ! I expected there would be," murmured the inspector to himself.

He went up to the judge's bedroom and looked round. He bent down by the side of the bed and sniffed.

"I expected to smell chloroform," he mused; "that is quite the simplest way to keep a sleeping man from waking up. They must have either hit him on the head, or tied him up and gagged him before he had time to wake up properly, and make a fuss."

There was a square envelope lying on the bedside table addressed to him and, with a quizzical smile, he picked it up and slit it open.

I hope you will realise now, [it ran] *that I am not a harmless lunatic. Whether I am your alternative or not, you are at liberty*

to judge for yourself. Sir Fellowes Allen is in my hands— Humphreys, Mrs. Whitelaw, Stannard, and Smithers will soon follow suit. I hope you will have an interesting time searching for the missing judge. John Armitage.

"So he is after the butler and the private detective as well," muttered Leslie. "I wonder where they are. Mrs. Whitelaw from all accounts isn't in the country, so we needn't bother about her."

Close to the table lamp lay a small revolver. He picked it up and examined it. It was loaded in every chamber.

"Does this belong to Sir Fellowes?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the butler. "I have noticed it in a drawer lately."

Leslie stuck the note and the revolver in his pocket and went down to view the window through which the midnight intruders had made their entrance. The catch had been forced very neatly, but there were signs to show that it had been tampered with.

"That looks like Dan Freeman's work," remarked the plain-clothes man. "You said he was one of this lot, didn't you, sir?"

"Didn't you recognize any of them?" asked the inspector.

"No, sir. It was too dark."

"I can't imagine how you let them come up behind you without hearing something. You weren't asleep, were you?"

The detective flushed.

"I certainly was not," he replied indignantly. "I suppose they had rubber soles to their shoes and, as I said, it was a beastly dark night."

Leslie smiled.

"All right, Robins," he said, "it can't be helped. I suppose you hadn't much chance. When is your relief due?"

"Eight o'clock, sir."

"Well, you'd better get back and stop him from coming."

He then turned to the servants, most of whom looked frightened out of their wits.

"Did any of you notice anything unusual last night?" he asked.

The housekeeper stepped forward.

"Well, I did, sir," she announced. "It must have been just after one that I thought I heard a noise. Sir Fellowes is not usually up at that time of the night, so I felt a little puzzled, sir — "

"And frightened too, I daresay," remarked Leslie with a smile.

"Yes, I suppose I was. At any rate I managed to pluck up enough courage to enable me to walk along the passage and open the green baize door that divides my apartments from the rest of the house. I was very astonished when I saw that the whole place was lit up."

"You mean all the electric lights were on ?"

"Yes, sir. Then I heard Sir Fellowes cough from somewhere below. I looked down the great stairs — you can see all the way down — and he was coming up putting all the lights out as he came, but what seemed to me curious was that he was in a dressing-gown."

"You think he had been to bed and had gone down for something ?"

She nodded.

"Why should that be curious ?"

"Because he is a particular gentleman, sir, and once he had retired would never go downstairs again. If he wanted something from below, he would think nothing of ringing for William to get up and fetch it for him."

"But surely one of you must have known that he had retired."

"As a rule I do not go to bed until after Sir Fellowes has gone, sir," put in the butler, "but last night Sir Phillip Humphreys dined here, and after he had left and I had locked up, the master told me that I need not wait up."

"I see." Leslie rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "It amounts to this then," he went on, "that by going downstairs in a dressing-gown after he had presumably retired, Sir Fellowes was breaking an invariable rule ?"

The butler nodded.

"That is so, sir."

"Then I think it is fairly evident," said the inspector, more to himself than to the others, "that he heard a sound, went to investigate, and that they slipped by him somewhere and waited for his return to the bedroom. The revolver certainly suggests that

he was apprehending a visit. Did anybody hear any sound suggestive of an attack ?"

They all replied that they had not.

"You see, sir," said the housekeeper. "I am the only one near enough to hear anything."

"And you heard nothing further ?"

"No, sir."

"Armitage," murmured Leslie to himself, "I take off my hat to you."

He had a further look round, then got into his car and drove to Arlington Gardens. To his surprise he found Meredith in possession.

"Hullo !" he said. "I thought you would have been sent back to Bucks."

"Why, sir ?" inquired the butler in astonishment.

"Are you expecting your master back ?"

"Certainly, sir. He said he would only be away for two or three days."

"I'm coming in, if you don't mind, Meredith."

He stepped into the hall and the butler closed the door behind him. Into the old man's face had come a look of dread.

"Is anything wrong, sir ?" he asked in a quavering voice.

"I'm afraid so," said Leslie.

He walked into the drawing-room and, selecting a chair, sat down and thoughtfully regarded the butler, who had followed him, looking thoroughly scared.

"I suppose you know nothing of this business ?" asked the inspector sternly.

"What business, sir ?" faltered the old servant. "For God's sake tell me what has happened !"

Leslie smiled a little.

"I suppose it was a bit unnecessary," he remarked, "to ask you if you had anything to do with it. As a matter of fact, Meredith, your master has started to carry out his threats of vengeance. He has kidnapped Sir Fellowes Allen !"

Meredith went as white as paper and sank into a chair. Immediately he attempted to rise, muttering an apology.

"Sit down !" said Leslie. "I want to talk to you, and anyway you'll be better sitting than standing."

The old man looked at him gratefully, and remained in the chair. He made rather a pathetic figure with his bent shoulders and pale, wretched face.

"I can't quite understand," went on Leslie, "why Mr. Armitage rented this flat. He has only been here a couple of days and now he has made it quite impossible to return, for naturally, as soon as he does so, he will be arrested. Has he said anything to you about the reason for his taking the place ?"

"No, sir. He simply said that he had taken it for a few months and that I was to come here with him."

"When did you see him last ?"

"When I returned from the theatre at twelve o'clock last night, sir. I found him with a packed suitcase ready to go away — the car was waiting at the door. He said that he would be away for two or three days."

"Weren't you surprised to know that he was leaving at that time of the night ?"

"Very, sir."

"Did he take the chauffeur with him ?"

"No, sir. He told him to return to Clifton Hall and stay there until he was sent for."

"Do you know of any other residence which Mr. Armitage has either purchased or rented ?"

"No, sir."

"There is no family estate besides the Hall, is there ?"

"No, sir."

"No London house anywhere ?"

"No, sir. Sir John once had a house in Curzon Street, but he sold it."

"Before you came to London did you notice any particular activity on the part of Mr. Armitage ?"

The old man hesitated.

"Come on, Meredith !" persuaded Leslie. "I am almost as keen to help him as you, and if there is a chance, I'll take it."

"There were several rather queer visitors to Clifton Hall," said

the old man slowly; "men who looked as though they might have been — er — criminals, sir. Mrs. Percival thought that they were ex-convicts who had been in — in Dartmoor prison with Mr. Armitage, sir, and had come down to blackmail him."

The inspector smiled.

"I know all about them," he said; "anything else ?"

"Mr. Armitage went away for three days just before those articles appeared in the papers."

"Ah ! Where did he go ?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did he go by car ?"

"No, sir. He went to Haddenham Station and took a train from there."

"You haven't any idea where he booked to ?"

"No, sir. I asked the driver, but he told me that he had driven back as soon as he had put Mr. Armitage down at the station."

"Were there any other visitors to Clifton Hall besides the men you have mentioned ?"

"There was Mr. Renfrew, the lawyer, and his son, sir, and half a dozen people from the surrounding district who came to welcome him home — he refused to see them. Then there was the newspaper reporter, Mr. Shadlow, from the *Aylesbury Recorder* and yourself, sir."

"Nobody else ?"

"No, sir."

"Did he see the reporter ?"

"Yes, sir."

"He did ?" Leslie spoke as though surprised.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Shadlow was in the library with him for some time."

"That is interesting." The inspector made a note on the back of an envelope. "Shadlow, you said ?"

"Yes, sir."

Leslie rose from his chair.

"I'm afraid I shall have to search the flat," he declared.

"Is that necessary, sir ?"

"Very."

Meredith shrugged his shoulders plaintively, and followed the

detective as he went from room to room making a thorough search of the contents of drawers, cupboards, and boxes. Nothing of the slightest value as a clue came to light, however, and eventually the inspector decided that there was nothing to be gained by staying in the flat.

"Did he take much in the way of clothing away with him ?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Meredith. "From what I have been able to ascertain since he left, he only took a couple of sets of underclothes, some shirts, pyjamas, collars, socks, handkerchiefs, a couple of ties, and one lounge suit besides the one he was wearing."

"Then he was not in evening dress ?"

"No, sir."

"And took no dress clothes with him ?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, Meredith, that will do, thanks."

He left the old man standing pathetically at the door, walked out of the building and entered his car. He sat thinking deeply for some moments without attempting to drive off.

"I wonder where Meadows has got to !" he said aloud. "I hope he is on the track, but somehow I don't think he is."

He drove to Scotland Yard and went up to his bare, uninviting office. It was not yet nine o'clock, but he was feeling desperately hungry. In response to his message a constable entered the room.

"Find out if Meadows has come in, or sent any word," he commanded; "and, if Mr. Morrison has arrived, ask him to be good enough to come along."

The man went out but was back in five minutes.

"Nothing has been seen of Meadows, sir," he said, "and there is no communication whatever from him."

"What about Mr. Morrison ?"

"He has not arrived yet, sir."

At that moment the door opened and an assistant commissioner, who was Leslie's immediate superior, entered the room. He curtly dismissed the constable and threw himself into a chair.

"I've just heard the news," he said tersely; "what are you doing about it ?"

The inspector gave him an account of his inquiries.

"You've nothing to go on at all ?" he asked, when Leslie had concluded his recital.

"Nothing, sir."

The assistant commissioner, who was a dark man with a small moustache, and an almost Hebraic type of countenance, looked worried.

"There'll be the very devil to pay," he opined, "especially after all the interest this man Armitage has managed to raise in himself. It is disastrous that he should kidnap an influential man like Allen from under our very noses."

"I took all the precautions I could, sir," observed Leslie. "I would have taken more, only you yourself refused to regard the matter seriously."

"I know I did. Don't rub it in !"

He rose and paced the room with quick, nervous strides.

"I shouldn't be surprised if there's a question asked in the House about this," he went on. "I think Allen is intimate with every man in the Cabinet. It's damnable ! Were there any reporters hanging round when you were at his house ?"

"No, sir. I don't think the papers have wind of the affair yet."

"Well, they soon will have," snapped the other, "and they won't let us off lightly." He stopped and glared at his subordinate. "You've got to find him, Leslie. I don't know how you're going to do it but it must be done and quickly, too !"

The inspector nodded.

"I came along here to think things out," he remarked, "and as soon as possible I'll get busy. There's just a chance that Meadows is on the track. He was on duty outside Armitage's flat, and he probably followed him. At all events I haven't seen or heard from him since last night, and he wasn't there this morning."

"I hope to God he is after him," said Mr. Chilsworth. "What do you think Armitage intends to do with Sir Fellowes ?"

"Goodness knows," replied Leslie. "The whole thing is fantastical."

"He'll probably murder him."

The inspector shook his head.

"No; he won't do that," he demurred. "He is not the murdering kind," he added, unconsciously repeating a remark made by Sir Fellowes Allen on the previous night.

"Well, what other reason could he have for kidnapping a man whom, we know, he hates? It is unthinkable that he could be after monetary gain — he is five times richer than Sir Fellowes now."

Leslie whistled thoughtfully.

"He may be scheming to ruin him," he asserted, "and intends to keep him out of the way while he does it."

"That's likely," agreed Mr. Chilsworth.

Suddenly the door burst open and Inspector Morrison shot in as though he had been forcibly thrust in. He caught sight of the assistant commissioner and stopped dead.

"Good morning, sir," he said affably.

"Good morning, Morrison," nodded the other. "Do you usually rush about like that, or has something happened to excite you?"

"Have you seen the morning papers?" asked the newcomer eagerly.

"Not yet," replied Leslie, while the commissioner shook his head.

Morrison took a copy of *The Daily Times* from his pocket and, spreading it out on Leslie's desk, pointed to a column with a stubby forefinger.

"Read that!" he said.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH MR. SHADLOW SURPRISES LESLIE

It was in the form of a letter addressed to the editor. It ran:

Dear Sir,

You have recently been good enough to print certain communications which I desired to make to the public. In those communications I dwelt at length on the way in which British justice was misused by Sir Fellowes Allen and Sir Phillip Humphreys when I was called upon to stand my trial for alleged manslaughter. I reminded the world at large of the threats I made, when those two between them had succeeded in breaking my father's heart and causing his death.

As I am acting without the slightest desire to hide my identity in the events which are about to take place, I am sending you this to inform you that my one ambition since I was convicted has been to seek retribution. My plans are made and I am now about to act. I intend to punish, and punish severely, not only the two gentlemen mentioned above, but also the witnesses who lied whilst under oath and thereby plunged me into the depths of degradation and caused the death of a gallant and noble gentleman.

By the time this letter is in print, I will have struck my first blow, and the rest will follow in rotation. It will be unfortunately necessary for me to disappear, for the time being, but I shall be ready and willing, once my work of retribution is completed, to hand myself over to the police. They can then do with me what they like.

In conclusion I beg to state that I am not insane. Many people will be prepared to believe so. To those I say: "Try to im-

agine the feelings of a perfectly innocent man, who is accused and convicted of the killing of one of his best friends, whose honour is sworn away in a public court, who sees his father die from the shock of his unjust conviction, and who is savagely sentenced to ten years penal servitude in a place where everything he holds most precious in life is debased and dishonoured. Perhaps there will be a few then who will understand.

I am, dear Sir,
Yours faithfully,
John Armitage

When they had read the letter, the assistant commissioner and Leslie looked at each other, the former with a frown of anger, the latter with an expression of grim resolve.

"Is it in any of the other papers ?" asked Chilsworth, turning to Morrison.

"In most of them, I think, sir," was the reply. "Anyhow I have seen it in five."

Leslie rang up the news editor of *The Daily Times,* whom he knew well.

"When did you receive that letter of Armitage's which you have printed this morning ?" he asked.

"At ten last night," was the reply.

"By post ?"

"No; it was brought to the office by district messenger."

"Have you the original ?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm coming along to see it."

He rang off and repeated his conversation to the others.

"What's the good of seeing the original ?" asked the commissioner querulously. "We know it was sent by Armitage. How will it help us to trace him ?"

"I've got an idea, sir. Leave it to me !"

Chilsworth turned away impatiently.

"You'd better go into this business with Leslie, Morrison," he said. "If we don't get results soon there is going to be a holy row. You arrested Armitage once, perhaps you'll have the pleasure of doing it again."

He walked abruptly out of the office. Morrison made a grimace at his companion.

"Poor old Chilsworth's nettled," he remarked.

Inspector Morrison had become stout since he had arrested Armitage, when a sergeant ten years before, but his moustache was still large and flowing, though now streaked with grey, and he retained his peculiar habit of wearing hats that appeared two sizes too small for him.

"What are you going to do ?" he asked.

"First of all I'm going to have some breakfast," was the reply. "Your vulgarly well-fed look makes me feel more famished than ever. After that I'm going to set to work to find Armitage. You knew that he had kidnapped Allen, I suppose ?"

Morrison nodded.

"Yes; heard it before I came up. There'll be some plain speaking to-day about that."

"Oh, shut up !" snapped Leslie irritably. "If you want to make yourself useful, hang on here until Meadows makes his report, but if he has tracked our bird, and you walk in and take him without waiting for me, I'll — I'll — "

"Well, what will you do ?" asked Morrison with interest.

"I'm hanged if I know. Still I'm not worrying. It's more likely Armitage has got Meadows than vice versa."

He hurried out and went to a cafe near by, where he made a prodigious breakfast. When he had satisfied his hunger, he drove to *The Daily Times* building, and was immediately taken to the office of the news editor. The latter received him eagerly, almost vociferously.

"So he's done it on you !" he cried.

"Don't be low !" remonstrated the inspector. "What do you mean ? Who has done it on me, and what has he done ?"

"We've just heard that Armitage kidnapped Sir Fellowes Allen last night," said the news editor. "One of our best men is working on the story now. You might have let me know," he added reprovingly.

"Who told you ?" asked Leslie.

"A mysterious 'phone message, my lad — no name given. We at once rang up Allen's residence and received corroboration."

"Damn it!" ejaculated Leslie, "Armitage seems to be employing a liaison officer. Let me see the original of that letter, Jim!"

The other stretched across his desk and picked up a sheet of paper which he handed to the detective. The latter studied it carefully. There was no heading; it was a plain piece of paper on which all but the signature had been typed.

"The r's and p's are out of alignment," he murmured to himself, "and the f's are not quite true."

"What are you muttering about?" asked the editor.

"I have a little theory," was the reply. "I'm going to borrow this for a while, if I may."

"Let me have it back then."

"You shall have it before the day is past, my son. I say; why didn't you let us know last night when you received this letter?"

"Why should we?"

"It might have enabled us to save Sir Fellowes."

"We weren't to know that, were we?"

"Think, my lad, think! That's the worst of you newspaper fellows, you never do use your brains."

He folded up the letter and put it in his pocket book. The news editor watched him seriously.

"Dennis, old chap," he said, "there's going to be a lot of trouble over this kidnapping, isn't there? What do you think Armitage will do with Allen?"

"Nothing if I can prevent him," replied Leslie shortly. He walked to the door, then turned back. "Let us down lightly, Jim," he said. "Chilsworth looks like having hysterics already."

The telephone bell rang shrilly, and the editor picked up the receiver.

"Yes, he's here," he said. He beckoned to Leslie. "Inspector Morrison wants to talk to you," he announced.

The detective took the receiver.

"Leslie speaking," he said. "What's the trouble — got a clue?"

"Meadows has just come in," reported Morrison. "He was found by a milkman and released!"

"What are you talking about?" cried Leslie. "Be more explicit, man!"

"Armitage's gang set on him last night, bound and gagged

him, and thrust him into a corner of a cabman's shelter in Arlington Gardens. He was unable to free himself or move the gag from his mouth, and there he had to stay until the milkman looked in by sheer accident."

Leslie gave an unprintable reply and hung up the receiver. He turned to the editor.

"It's my belief, Jimmy," he remarked, "that the police force is nowadays composed of old women."

"I quite agree with you," said the editor.

A couple of minutes later Leslie was threading his way through the traffic en route for Aylesbury. Once away from London he opened out the throttle, and the long low car ate up the miles, with the result that it was hardly an hour from the time he left the newspaper offices when he drew up before the door of the building that housed *The Aylesbury Recorder* in the market square of that quaint country town. Inside he found a couple of girl typists and a small untidy, freckled-faced boy, who was apparently sucking sweets, to judge from the enormous bulge that showed in one cheek.

"Is Mr. Shadlow in ?" inquired Leslie.

The boy shook his head and went on with the sucking process. The detective regarded him with interest.

"Do you take any other form of nourishment ?" he asked.

The boy gave an enormous gulp and looked startled.

"I swallowed he whole !" he exclaimed in alarm.

"It serves you right for being greedy," said one of the girls severely.

"I understand that Mr. Shadlow is not in ?" observed Leslie with commendable patience.

"No, he ain't," said the boy.

"Well, who is ?"

"Us !" was the reply, "and, of course, the boss."

"I'll see the boss then. Take this card to him !"

The boy accepted the card without enthusiasm and read it laboriously, then suddenly his face became purple with excitement, his eyes appeared to be goggling from his head. He swung round to the girls.

"It's a Lunnon 'tec," he whispered hoarsely; "a real 'un !"

Having imparted this startling information, he dived into an inner sanctum like a rabbit heading into its burrow. The two girls sat as though transfixed and quite forgot that they had work to do. Leslie bore the sensation he had caused without any undue display of elation, but nevertheless felt a trifle relieved when the office boy reappeared and announced that the boss was waiting to see him. The last remark he heard as he entered the holy of holies was calculated to take all conceit out of him.

"He don't look like a 'tec, do he ?" said the boy. "He looks more like them dudes you sees on the pictures."

The inspector found himself in a stuffy little office, in which a large desk rose like an island amidst a sea of newspapers. At the desk sat a little wizened man, with a pair of horn-rimmed glasses perched on his forehead. He waved his visitor to a chair, which Leslie discovered, after a moment of doubt, hidden under an enormous file of papers. He removed the file, and sat down.

"I am the editor !" announced the little man.

"So I presumed," said the inspector. "I came here to see a certain Mr. Shadlow who, I understand, is employed by you."

"Yes, yes; you are quite right ! He is my sub-editor and, I may say, my right-hand man. I find him most excellent, my dear sir, and a most valuable assistant. Lately he has been away rather more than I consider necessary, but he thinks that that is the only way to obtain news first-hand, and I must admit that he has become possessed of information — valuable information — which we have been able to publish simultaneously with, in fact sometimes ahead of, our London contemporaries."

He stopped for breath, but Leslie was by no means irritated by his verbosity. He felt that he also had received some valuable information.

"Is Mr. Shadlow away now ?" he asked.

"Yes, he is in town, but I expect him down tomorrow."

"I see. Where is he staying ?"

"At the *Half Moon Hotel* in Mornington Crescent."

"Thanks, I'll go there and see him."

"Is he — er — is he helping you in any way ? There have been

times when he has done good work for the Aylesbury police."

"No; he is not working with us at the moment, but it is quite likely that we may find him useful in the near future."

The editor looked gratified.

"It will be an honour for my paper to be associated with Scotland Yard," he declared.

"Does Mr. Shadlow use a typewriter ?" asked Leslie.

"Yes," replied the old man in surprise; "why ?"

"I thought you wouldn't mind my using it for a minute or two. I have a note I want to write, and I can't manage a pen very well — injured hand, you know."

He rubbed his right hand, aand the editor watched the process sympathetically.

"Dear ! dear !" he clucked; "how inconvenient ! You will find Mr. Shadlow's typewriter in the office in there."

He indicated a door which the detective had not hitherto noticed. Leslie thanked the editor and went into a room which was even smaller than, though not so untidy as, the other. He found a typewriter on a small desk and, picking up a piece of paper from a pile near the instrument, set to work and typed a copy of Armitage's letter. That done, he folded up both sheets of paper and returned to the other office.

"I hope you don't think me a nuisance for taking up your valuable time," he said.

"Not at all," replied the editor warmly. "I am very delighted to have made your acquaintance and to learn that my paper and Scotland Yard may shortly be associated."

He saw Leslie to the door and bowed him off the premises, the two girls and the office boy following the detective out to the pavement and watching him drive away.

Outside Aylesbury the inspector drew up and, taking from his pocket both the paper on which he had typed and the document he had borrowed from the offices of *The Daily Times,* he compared the characters. After five minutes careful study he replaced the two sheets of paper in his pocket book with a smile of satisfaction.

"Now for Mornington Crescent and the *Half Moon Hotel !*" he murmured.

He found the hotel a public house which did an additional business by letting rooms on the "bed and breakfast" principle. Walking into the saloon bar, he ordered a bottle of Worthington, and took stock of his surroundings. A burly, bullet-headed man, obviously the landlord, strolled up behind the bar for a chat. He had once been a famous full-back with one of the prominent league clubs and Leslie found that his conversational abilities centred mostly round sport. The inspector was about to ask for Shadlow when it occurred to him that he might be able to find out a great deal more at the present juncture by keeping the reporter under observation than by trying to force him to tell what he knew. With a view to discovering if the landlord was concerned in the affair at all, he adroitly changed the subject to the letter which had appeared in the papers that morning.

"That fellow Armitage has got his nerve," the landlord remarked admiringly, "fancy writing a letter like that !"

"I think he's either mad or trying to get cheap notoriety," said Leslie with contempt.

"Don't you believe it, sir," returned the other. "He means what he says right enough. Haven't you seen the early editions of the evening papers ?"

The inspector shook his head.

"S'truth !" the landlord exclaimed in surprise. "I thought everybody had heard the news. Why the papers have been selling like hot cakes, and the placards — my ! I think the whole of London is buzzing with excitement. Here, Jim," he called to a barman, "bring me a copy of the *Planet !"*

The paper was duly brought, and the landlord placed it before Leslie with the air of a conjurer producing a rabbit from a hat.

"There !" he said triumphantly. "Just you read that !"

In enormous headlines the kidnapping of Sir Fellowes Allen was reported, and practically the whole of the front page was taken up with an account of the sensational event, with a history of Armitage's trial and conviction. The gist of the communications which the ex-convict had sent to the papers was also included, and a paragraph which made Leslie clench his teeth. It was to the effect that the police appeared to have been very lax in the matter and that an explanation should be called for at an

early date. The paper went on to say that the public would be greatly alarmed at the knowledge that two or three daring men could break into a house at night, with the greatest ease, and carry off the owner, and that until police methods were reorganized and the body of Metropolitan constabulary tightened up, nobody would feel safe. There were several other remarks concerning the grave reflection which had been cast on New Scotland Yard, and a call for strict investigation. But what raised Leslie's ire most of all was a statement that Detective Inspector Leslie, who was in charge of the case, had found a note addressed to him in the judge's bedroom; and an exact copy of the message was printed! As it had never been out of his possession since he tore open the envelope, Leslie knew that facsimiles must have been sent to the papers by the same man who had sent copies of the other letter.

He handed back the paper with an assumed air of astonishment.

"By Jove!" he remarked. "It looks bad, doesn't it?"

"It does, sir," nodded the landlord. "I bet the police are wild, but they'll get him, you mark my words. I've been told that that Inspector Leslie is a very cute one when it comes to running down criminals. Personally I don't think this paper has been fair to the police, but I shouldn't be surprised if it didn't have to change it's tone soon. What puzzles me is what Armitage means to do with the judge!"

"Don't you think he'll murder him?"

The erstwhile footballer shook his head.

"No," he said; "I don't think so. If he was going to murder him, he would have done it there and then. Besides, you must remember, Armitage was once a first class cricketer and he would be too much of a sportsman to murder anybody."

Leslie smiled at the whim and asked the landlord to join him in a drink, which the latter did. They had returned to sport again and the detective was wondering how he could broach the subject of Shadlow without causing suspicion, when he heard footsteps behind him, and turned round to see the entry of a tall, loose-limbed individual who was so flagrantly nondescript as to be almost striking. He walked with a slouch, had a red face,

red-rimmed, colourless eyes, and a cigarette hanging from a loose under lip.

"Ah !" exclaimed the landlord; "this is a man who could tell you a lot about the Armitage case."

The newcomer looked at Leslie and appeared to find him pleasing, for he smiled and nodded.

"This gentleman and I," went on the ex-footballer, "were talking about the affair in to-day's papers. I daresay you know a thing or two about it, eh, Mr. Shadlow ?"

Benjamin grinned expansively.

"What I don't know about the matter or, as we reporters would say, story, ain't — I mean isn't — worth knowing. I daresay," he added, placing his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, "that I have a greater knowledge of it than anyone else in London, and that's not boasting neither."

"You've been working on it, haven't you ?" asked the landlord.

"Ra-ather !" exclaimed Mr. Shadlow. "I should think I have."

"In with the police I suppose ?" put in Leslie.

Benjamin nodded, and flicking the cigarette-end away, lit another.

"I've just been having a disputation with one of the inspectors of Scotland Yard and — "

"A what ?" inquired the inspector politely.

Mr. Shadlow's face went a deeper red than its wont.

"A — a talk," he said, and immediately recovered his assurance. "He's a clever fellow, but doesn't think enough. I was able to give him a few con — ideas. You've probably heard of the fellow I mean," he added coolly, "name of Leslie — Detective Inspector Leslie !"

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. PENNINGTON OF HAMPSTEAD

Dennis Leslie made a choking sound, and blamed the beer.

"You can't take your Worthington too quick," admonished the landlord. "It's a beer that wants to be drunk slow and thoughtful, with your mind on nothing else, so to speak."

Benjamin gracefully accepted the glass ordered for him by Leslie, and presently the landlord strolled away to talk to another customer who had come in. With great care the inspector proceeded to pump the reporter, but he was handicapped by the fear of giving himself away, and the information he elicited from the talkative Benjamin gave him no clue. As soon as generalities were dropped and Leslie asked a question regarding Armitage, Mr. Shadlow's mouth closed like an oyster, and he became vague and rather uneasy. Eventually, well satisfied with his morning's work, the detective parted from his new acquaintance. He had learned one item of importance and that was that the reporter was not going back to Aylesbury for several days. He had not mentioned the name of the town, but Leslie knew enough about him to be able to conjecture what he had meant.

"I am on a large newspaper in the country," he had said, "and I am always given a free hand — the editor knows a live wire when he sees one — and I feel I shall be able to do more good by staying up here than by remigrating for a week or so."

As soon as he had left the public house, Leslie drove up the road until he was out of sight, then stopped and went into a tobacconist's close by, which had a public telephone booth. He rang up the Yard and gave orders for Meadows to jump into a taxi and join him at once. He then returned to his car and waited for his as-

sistant to arrive, which the latter did in less than a quarter of an hour.

"You're a nice sort of idiot!" was the remark with which the inspector greeted him. "You've let us down badly by losing sight of Armitage. How on earth did that gang get hold of you?"

"They must have come out of the back way and stalked me, sir," replied Meadows ruefully.

"Well, I'm going to give you another chance," said Leslie severely, "and if you let me down this time — God help you! There's a fellow living in the *Half Moon* down the road there, and you've got to follow him wherever he goes and report all his movements to me. He may still be in the saloon bar: if he is, you'll be able to get a good look at him; if he isn't, you'll have to trust to my description."

As it happened Mr. Benjamin Shadlow was still in the same place and, catching a glimpse of him as he hurried by with face averted, the inspector sent Meadows in to have a drink and incidently to take a good look at the reporter. When the officer emerged five minutes later and announced that he would know his quarry anywhere, Leslie returned to his car and drove back to Scotland Yard.

He had lunch in the building and spent the afternoon with Morrison, going through the masses of reports and rumours that were continually coming in. The whole of the police system was by now working to find Armitage and his six confederates, and the result was that numerous telephone and documentary messages were being received. It was a difficult task to sift the promising from the useless statements, and by six o'clock, Leslie and his colleague decided that they had had enough. There is a peculiarity about the mentality of some people, but it is a fact that when a crime which rouses the public interest is committed, there is a certain number of otherwise reasonable beings who come forward and make reports which are entirely imaginary. Generally it is done merely for the sake of notoriety, there being a strange type of person who would do anything to see his name in print, even if it were as a criminal. There have even been cases of men actually giving themselves up and confessing to murder, only for the police to discover that they were impostors.

Among the number of reports received by Leslie and Morrison that afternoon were several statements made by individuals in widely separated districts, that they had seen some of the wanted men, but nothing tangible came through. Mr. Chilsworth had made his appearance once looking very much perturbed. He had told the two inspectors that he and the Commissioner had been asked to see the Home Secretary in the House at five o'clock, and that a member of the Opposition had sent in a notice that he would ask a question regarding the abduction of Sir Fellowes Allen on the morrow. Leslie had put on another man with Meadows and had appointed two others to relieve them when their time of duty was over. He had made up his mind that Mr. "Benny" Shadlow would not go anywhere without, at least, one detective close behind him. Arrangements had also been made to examine all letters arriving for the reporter.

Soon after six the inspector drove to Hampstead. He went by way of Mornington Crescent but found no sign of his men and concluded that Benjamin was out. He called at Mary Fulcher's dainty little flat close to the Heath and, to his relief, found her at home. She seemed rather pleased to see him than otherwise, and gave him some tea.

"Of course you know why I called ?" he remarked.

"I can guess," she nodded sadly, "but I haven't seen anything of my brother since yesterday morning. I don't suppose I shall again until — until — "

She hesitated and looked on the point of tears.

"Perhaps it's not as bad as all that," he said clumsily in an effort to comfort her. "When we get Armitage we shall not bother much about the rest, and there is quite a possibility that he may get off."

"What is the good of talking like that ?" she protested. "You know very well that, if they're caught, they'll all suffer."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well," he remarked; "we'll hope for the best."

She gave a tremulous little laugh.

"Here am I," she murmured, "hobnobbing with the man who is trying to put my brother in jail."

"I'm not !" he declared indignantly.

"Don't prevaricate! You are. You have only come to see me in the hope that you may be able to get a little information about his whereabouts. Supposing he walked in now, what would you do?"

"Tell him to lead me to Armitage's hiding-place."

"And if he wouldn't?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You'd arrest him," she declared.

"On what charge?" he countered.

"On the charge of being concerned with — with Mr. Armitage in the abduction of Sir Fellowes Allen."

"I could only arrest him on suspicion," he assured her, "and probably would have to let him go again. I have nothing to prove that either he or anybody else is concerned with Armitage in the crime."

"I never had a chance," she said, "to try my persuasive powers on Mr. Armitage as you suggested. He acted too suddenly."

"More's the pity," he sighed. "Of course whatever happens he's in for it now. I'm wondering what methods he intends to adopt to get hold of the rest of his proposed victims. It will be almost impossible after what happened last night."

"Are they all in London?" she asked.

"Three of them are — nobody seems to know where Mrs. Whitelaw is."

"I do!" she announced calmly.

"You?" he cried. "How on earth do you know?"

"Because by rather a coincidence she lives three doors away from here."

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. Then, "Hang it! That's another trouble on my hands."

"You poor man," she murmured, "you must be having a very worrying time."

"How on earth did you find out that she was living so close by?" he demanded.

"When I was a little girl," she related, "I was seriously ill, and I was attended by Dr. Padden, the famous brain specialist. Ever since that time he has been almost like a father to me. He used to live in Wimpole Street, next door to Dr. Whitelaw, and he was

called in on the day that Dr. Whitelaw died. He lives in a large house near Sevenoaks now and seldom comes to town, but the day before yesterday he came up specially to see me with Mrs. Padden, and they had tea here. Afterwards we were all sitting at the open window talking and a lady passed by. Dr. Padden recognized her immediately, to his great astonishment — he had heard that she had gone to some relations in Ireland — "

Leslie nodded.

"That was our information also," he said.

"The doctor was intensely interested," she went on, "and looked out of the window after her. He saw her go into the house next door but one."

"She may not live there."

"Oh, yes, she does," she smiled. "I am a woman, you see, and I was very curious ! But she isn't living under her own name — she calls herself Mrs. Pennington."

"Are you sure that she is the same ?"

"Positive ! At least Dr. Padden was positive."

Leslie got up and strolled to the window as though he expected to see her pass. He gazed down thoughtfully at the road for a few minutes, then turned and came back to Mary.

"Did you tell your brother ?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I wonder if Armitage knows," he mused. "I'll look her up when I leave here. Is it a flat she is living in ?"

"No, she has the whole house to herself. It's a lovely place, with a beautiful garden."

They sat chatting for a little while longer. Then he rose to go.

"I hope that next time I see you," she said slowly, "you won't have arrested my brother."

"I hope I never do," he replied earnestly, looking straight into her glorious eyes. "I shall feel quite satisfied when I have found Armitage and Sir Fellowes."

"I don't wish you any ill-luck," she murmured, "but I hope you never do find Mr. Armitage. I am going to do my little best to search for him and, if I do discover him, I shall try to persuade him to let Sir Fellowes Allen go and give up his thirst for vengeance."

He smiled at her as he shook hands.

"Don't break the law in your efforts!" he warned her; "otherwise I may have to arrest you as an accessory."

"I think I'd rather be arrested by you," she declared, "than by anyone else."

Leslie made his way to the house two doors away. It was a large place, standing well back in its own grounds and having an appearance of opulence and good taste. He walked up the carriage drive and rang the bell. A trim maid opened the door almost immediately.

"Is Mrs. Pennington in?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. What name please?"

He handed her a card, which she took away, to return a few minutes later and show him into a drawing-room. It was essentially a woman's apartment, being full of cushions and hangings of soft shaded silks, with bowls of magnificent roses standing on every table. The furniture was Chippendale, the carpet Turkish, and the grand piano a Beckstein. A few valuable etchings, including two by Whistler, hung on the walls, and there was a carved Chinese blackwood table containing some rare pieces of Dresden and Sèvres pottery, and even a piece of the famous Palissy enamelled ware, besides other and cheaper ornaments which spoilt the effect entirely. There were some exquisite ivory statuettes on another delicately carved table; but what caught Leslie's eye immediately was a large marble statue of the figure of Liberty, which stood in one corner of the room. He whistled softly as he gazed at it.

"Curious woman," he said aloud. "I should have thought that she would have got rid of that ugly reminder."

"I keep it for a purpose," murmured a soft voice, and he swung round to find himself face to face with the beautiful object of his remarks, who had entered the room noiselessly behind him.

"So you are Mrs. Whitelaw?" he asked.

"I was," she corrected him. "My name is Pennington now."

"Real or assumed?" he inquired.

"Real of course," she replied with a frown of annoyance. "Why should I assume a name?"

"The other may have held too many unhappy memories for you."

She shrugged her shoulders and sank on to a divan, waving him to a seat at the same time. He chose one from where he could get the clearest view of her face.

Patricia Whitelaw had been a beautiful woman; Patricia Pennington was more beautiful. Despite the lapse of a decade her loveliness had increased rather than diminished. Her features were perfect, her skin flawless, her hair glorious. There was far more expression in her face now and none of the doll-like dullness of ten years before. But, looking at her, Leslie felt there was something missing. For a long time he was puzzled, but just before he left he thought that he had solved the riddle — she had no soul!

"I married again," she remarked, "five years ago. My husband is the British Consul in Buenos Aires."

"You prefer living in this country to the Argentine?"

"Not at all, but I have been out there long enough. I returned three months ago."

"May I ask why you retain that marble statue?"

Her eyes flashed.

"Because," she replied in a hard voice, "it keeps alive my hatred of the man who killed my husband."

"Rather unnecessary, isn't it?" he asked. "He has suffered for his crime."

"He should have been hanged," she retorted harshly.

"It is because of him," he observed, "that I am here. Perhaps you have not heard that he has sworn vengeance on all those who had a hand in his ruin?"

She laughed lightly.

"I know all about it," she admitted. "He has probably gone mad."

"Whether he is mad or not," said Leslie, "he has managed to get Sir Fellowes Allen into his power. He has sworn to get you among others. Our information was that you were in Ireland, otherwise I would have taken measures for your protection sooner."

"I desire no protection," she replied. "It is unlikely that Armitage knows that I am in London and, if he does, I am not worried.

I am rather puzzled to know how you found out, but I suppose it is difficult to keep anything from the police."

"Was it your desire that the police should not know of your presence in London ?"

"Of course not. Why should I hide myself ?"

He ignored her question.

"If you have no objection," he said, "I will put men on to keep an eye on your house for the time being, and to keep within hailing distance whenever you go out. It will — "

To his astonishment she broke into a very torrent of angry declination.

"I will not have policemen hanging round my house or following me about," she cried. "Do you hear ? I don't want your protection, and I won't have it ! I am not afraid of Armitage and I defy him to attempt anything. I have ample means for my own safety and I will not be watched or spied on by the police or anybody else !"

"But, madam," he protested, "we are not intending to spy on you. We would be merely safeguarding you."

She suddenly quieted down.

"I'm sorry I got angry," she apologized. "It was rather ungrateful of me, wasn't it ? But please do not place any of your men to watch outside this house, or to follow me about. I should hate it."

"I'm sorry," he said coldly, "but I'm afraid I must. It is my duty to take precautions whether you like it or not."

She seemed about to burst into another fit of temper, but she managed to control herself with an effort and shrugged her shoulders.

"It seems that I have no choice," she complained, "but I still entreat you not to carry out your intentions."

He ignored her request.

"Have you a burglar alarm fitted to your windows and doors ?" he asked.

"No."

"Then I advise you to have it done at once. Have you any men on the premises ?"

"Two — the butler and the gardener."

"H'm! Not much good I'm afraid. Do they both sleep in the house?"

"The butler does."

"Can you manage to give a room inside to the gardener?"

"I daresay that can be done."

"If you do that it will help a bit perhaps. You haven't had any communication from Armitage at all?"

"No," she replied. "I tell you I am sure he doesn't know I am in London."

"Let us hope he doesn't," said Leslie fervently.

"I believe you are frightened of him," she jeered.

"I am frightened for you," he retorted sharply.

"Most remarkably kind of you," she observed ironically.

A few minutes later he left the house and returned to his car which was still standing outside Mary's flat. She was leaning out of the window as he got in, and waved her hand to him. He waved back and gave her a cheerful smile. As he drove away his mind was fixed on Mrs. Pennington and her beautiful residence.

"I don't know why," he murmured, "but I'd give a good deal to make a thorough search of that house."

CHAPTER XVIII

MARY MAKES A DISCOVERY

Mary dined out with friends that night and it was late before she returned home. The result was that it was after midnight when she got into bed. She put out the light and lay for some time thinking of her brother and Armitage, and had just decided that she was too tired to cogitate any longer when she heard a distinct sound, as though the door of the flat had been softly opened and closed. At once she was sitting up in bed with all her senses on the alert, and presently heard the sound of movement in the next room which had been her brother's bedroom, followed by a distinct click suggesting that the electric light had been switched on.

Mary was a courageous little person and she did not hesitate now. She got out of bed as quietly as she could and wrapped a dressing-gown round her slender form. Then, stealing softly to the door, she crept out into the passage and stood for several moments listening. The door of the other room was wide open and a stream of light flowed out into the hall. Whoever the intruder was, he appeared to be very clumsy, for he was making a considerable amount of noise. Gradually she edged her way along by the wall until she could glance into her brother's bedroom.

A man was standing with his back to her, going hastily through the pockets of clothes hanging in a wardrobe. He appeared to be in a great hurry, for every now and again he made an impatient sound with his tongue. For a minute or two Mary watched him, her heart beating tumultuously, then she walked into the room.

"Sydney," she called in a low voice, "what are you doing here ?"

He swung round with a cry of alarm.

"By Jove, Mary," he gasped, "you gave me quite a shock !"

Recovering himself he smiled rather uneasily, but crossed to her and gave her an affectionate kiss. She returned the caress rather coldly.

"Where have you been ?" she asked, "and why did you go away without a word to me ?"

"I'm sorry, old girl," he returned, "but circumstances prevented me from saying good-bye. You know that I am engaged in helping Mr. Armitage, and so you probably realize that I cannot remain here now; I am — am wanted by the police, you see."

"I know all about that," she remarked quietly, "and I am terrified at the risk you are running. There is a detective watching the flat."

He nodded.

"I expected that," he said, "and managed to locate him. When he strolled a few yards up the road I dashed into the porch and hid there until his back was turned again. Then I ran up the stairs and came in."

"Why have you taken such a risk ?" she cried. "You are in terrible danger here !"

"I am not stopping long," he assured her.

"But you'll never get out without being seen." She clasped her hands together in her perturbation.

"I'll have to chance it," he responded.

"Oh, why didn't you listen to me ? I implored you not to join Mr. Armitage in his schemes. And now you are a hunted man, and have robbed me of all my happiness."

He looked at her rather sheepishly.

"I'm sorry, Mary," he muttered, "but after seven years, or nearly seven years, in prison, I was ready for anything to get my own back, and Armitage offered me the opportunity."

"But what about the months of happiness we had together," she reminded him, "before Mr. Armitage was released. Didn't that make you change your mind ?"

"I felt a little differently," he admitted, "but I had given my word."

"Oh, bother your word !" she cried impatiently. "You prate about keeping your promise, but what about your honour ? Must that be sacrificed for a promise ? You have become a criminal

again, Sydney, and have made me the sister of a criminal, when I was trying hard to forget the past and just live in the present and future."

His face had a strained look and he appeared to be about to say something, but shrugged his shoulders and remained silent. He was very much like Mary in features, but was very much fairer than she, and his face lacked the character that showed so prominently in hers.

"Perhaps it isn't too late now," she went on eagerly. "You can hide here until there is a chance for you to get away and cross to France or somewhere, where you will be safe until it all blows over. Won't you give it up for my sake ?"

He shook his head.

"I can't — now," he said. "I've got to go through with it."

She made no further effort to dissuade him.

"Then take me with you," she pleaded. "I can look after you perhaps, and — and if you are caught, I can suffer with you."

"Good Lord !" he exclaimed; "do you mean that ?"

She nodded her head, and he stood looking down at her with an expression of tenderness on his face.

"Mary," he said gently, "there never was a sister like you !"

"Then you'll take me ?" she asked.

"It's impossible ! Of course I can't take you. I am not such a brute as all that."

"I want to come."

He shook his head emphatically.

"I wouldn't dream of it !" he said decidedly.

She sighed and there were tears in her eyes.

"I think you are breaking my heart," she murmured.

"For God's sake," he cried, "don't say things like that ! I feel bad enough about the way I have treated you already."

He went back and rummaged among his clothes in the wardrobe again. She followed, and watched him.

"What are you looking for ?" she asked.

"I've been an awful fool," he blurted out, still continuing his search. "I received a note from Armitage last Saturday and forgot to destroy it. I only remembered it to-day and I had to come back to find it in case it fell into the hands of the police."

"Is it very incriminating ?"

"It might cause ruin to all Armitage's plans."

"Oh, how careless of you !" she said impulsively.

He looked at her in surprise.

"Are you keen on his carrying out his intentions then ?" he asked.

"No, of course not, but I don't want him or you to be caught."

Suddenly he gave a low cry of triumph and took a crumpled letter from an overcoat pocket.

"I remember now," he said. "It was a cold evening and I was wearing this coat when the note was handed to me. I must have stuffed it into my pocket and left it there."

He looked at it to make sure that it was the right one, then tore it up into small pieces and threw it into the fireplace.

"I must go now," he declared.

"Can't you wait until the morning ?" she pleaded.

"No; the risk would be doubled. Good-bye, Mary !"

"No; no !" she cried. "I can't let you go like this. You must have some supper first."

He demurred in a half-hearted fashion, but she would hear of no refusal.

"Go into the dining-room," she said. "I must put on some slippers."

"Do you mean to say — " he began, but she had gone.

After she had put on her slippers she went along to the pantry, and presently entered the dining-room laden with edibles.

"I can't wake up Alice," she remarked; "it wouldn't be fair."

She accepted his offer to help, and presently the two of them were rummaging amongst the contents of the pantry like a couple of happy children, having quite forgotten, for the moment, the troubles that oppressed them so heavily. Mary was making her last journey when, in passing by the front door, she happened to glance in that direction. Whether it was instinct or a precautionary measure engendered by her anxiety she never knew, but she put her ear to the keyhole and listened. The next moment her face had gone the colour of chalk and she hastened along to the dining-room, a great fear showing in her eyes. As Sydney caught sight of her, an exclamation broke from his lips.

"There's somebody outside the door," she whispered hoarsely, "and I think he is listening at the keyhole. I could hear him breathing quite plainly !"

It was Fulcher's turn to look horrified now. He clutched at his collar as though it were choking him and his breath came in quick short pulsations.

"It's that detective," he gasped. "He must have seen me come in and he's waiting there to catch me when I go out. What on earth am I to do ?"

It was Mary who recovered herself first.

"There's a rain pipe running down close by the window of your bedroom," she said. "Do you think you could climb down that way ? It's rather risky !"

"Oh, I'll get down that all right," he declared in a tone of relief. "Of course there may be another detective waiting outside, but — "

"No, I am sure there is only one. You see, it was very unlikely that you would return, wasn't it ?"

"I'd better be off at once," he said, looking regretfully at the well-spread table.

She noticed the look and sighed.

"I think you had better," she agreed. "It would be too dangerous to stop any longer now, but be careful going down the pipe, won't you ?"

He smiled reassuringly and took her into his arms in a brotherly hug.

"God bless you, Mary," he murmured hoarsely. "You're a much better sister than I deserve."

She kissed him affectionately and went with him into his bedroom. The light was switched off and the window gently raised. He threw one leg over the sill and felt for the rain pipe, then Mary lost her courage a little. His perilous position and the intense blackness of the night combined to frighten her, and she had to clench her hands to prevent herself from calling him back.

"Do be careful !" she whispered. "If you fall I shall never forgive myself."

"Don't worry !" he replied cheerfully. "There is only one floor under this you know."

A moment later he had disappeared and she leaned out, anx-

iously listening to the scraping noise he made as he descended and wondering if he would rouse the occupant of the room below. After what seemed an incredible time his guarded voice came floating up to her through the still atmosphere.

"All right !" he said. "Good-bye !"

She drew a huge sigh of relief and closed the window; then, returning to the hall, she went to the door and listened again. For some minutes she heard nothing and began to fear that the detective, if it were he, had gone back to his post in the road. But suddenly the electric bell rang, and she jumped with the shock of it. She hurried to the dining-room, turned out the light, and hastened to her own bedroom where she threw off her dressing-gown and slippers and got into bed. The bell rang again and again and, after a while, she heard the footsteps of Alice as the maid went to the door. There followed a sound of altercation; one voice, that of a woman, being raised apparently in resentment; the other, a man's, speaking in low, conciliatory tones. Mary's mind was working rapidly, but she soon decided on the attitude she would adopt. Presently came a knock at the door.

"Are you awake, miss ?" asked Alice.

"Yes, what is it ?"

"There's a detective at the door, miss. He says he wants to see you."

"What ! at this time of the night ?"

"Yes, miss."

"What does he want ?"

"He won't say, miss."

"All right, Alice. Tell him I'll come in five minutes."

She rose, wrapped her dressing-gown round her once more, put on her slippers, brushed her already tidy, shingled hair, and went along to the front door. A tall, thin, cadaverous-looking man was standing there with his hat in his hands.

"This is an extraordinary time to disturb anybody, isn't it ?" she asked in querulous tones.

"I'm sorry, miss," replied the detective, "but I have my duty to do."

"You're a police officer, I believe. What do you want ?"

"I was on duty outside this house — you probably know why !

— and I saw a man enter in a stealthy manner. I followed him up to this landing and I think I am correct in saying that the fellow I was after came in here."

"What a suggestion !" she cried. "Who was the man you think you saw ?"

"Your brother !"

"Well, I assure you he is not here."

"I'm sorry, miss, but I have my doubts about that. I could distinctly see a reflection of light under the door, and I'll swear I heard voices."

She looked at him pityingly and turned to the maid who was hovering in the background.

"Alice," she asked, "have you heard voices, seen lights, or noticed my brother come in ?"

"Of course not, miss," answered the girl in a scathing voice. "You take my word for it, this fellow's up to no good. I don't believe he's a policeman at all or, if he is, he's one of the sort that go about looking for trouble in the hope of getting promotion quick."

The detective flushed a little.

"I've been outside this door for well over half an hour," he said, "and I'm pretty certain that there's a man in this flat. One of the voices I heard was a man's."

Mary shrugged her dainty shoulders.

"If you are so insistent," she observed, "you can come in and satisfy yourself."

He accepted the invitation with alacrity and, led by Mary and followed by the indignant Alice, made a tour of the flat. He took care to search all the likely places where a man could hide, and in the dining-room gazed with marked suspicion at the table laid for supper.

"Who are you expecting to supper, miss ?" he asked.

"I suppose I can lay the table for myself, can't I ?" countered Mary.

"But you haven't eaten anything," objected the detective, "and I saw you come in over an hour ago."

"It is a woman's privilege to change her mind."

Alice's lips twitched; she had a great sense of humour. When

she had first noticed the table covered with viands her eyes had opened very wide and she had glanced suspiciously at her mistress, but she was devoted to her and kept her thoughts to herself.

It could be seen that the detective was not at all satisfied. However, he had inspected every room in the flat and had discovered no sign of the man for whom he was searching. It was with great reluctance, therefore, that he made his way out, looking very puzzled and annoyed.

"The man you saw," said Mary sweetly, "probably went into one of the other flats."

He grunted and bade her good-night. Early next morning he was seen to be examining the outside of the house, and spent some time looking at the rainwater pipe which ran down from the roof and passed close to Sydney Fulcher's bedroom window. After his survey, it was noticed that he stuck his hands deep into his trousers pockets and returned to his post in the road with an expression of gloomy disgust on his face.

As soon as she had shut the door on their midnight visitor, Alice turned to her mistress.

"Mr. Sydney *has* been here, miss !" she said accusingly.

"What nonsense !" retorted Mary with a smile. "Go to bed at once, Alice !"

The girl laughingly obeyed her.

As soon as the flat was silent once more, Mary went into her brother's bedroom. She switched on the light and crossed to the fireplace where she knelt and carefully gathered together the fragments of the letter Sydney had destroyed. These she carried back to her bedroom and set to work to piece them together. It was a long, laborious task and at times she almost despaired of being able to accomplish it, for he had torn the letter up into such minute scraps. However she persisted, despite the fact that several times she was on the verge of falling asleep and, after nearly two hours' toil, she had the satisfaction of completing what had proved to be a species of jigsaw puzzle. But when she saw what the letter contained, she forgot that she was tired, forgot everything, except the fact that she had made a great discovery. The words before her told her what she had been aching to know. She was in pos-

session of information for which Scotland Yard would probably be offering a large reward before long. The letter ran as follows:

Dear Fulcher,

I want you to go down to the hulk tomorrow and have a look round. You will find Hardy and Thompson down there and they will tell you of anything extra that is required. As you have not been there before, you will have a certain amount of difficulty in finding your way. The best thing you can do is to take the train down to Tilbury and walk along the Southend Road for two miles until you come to the village of Crackenthorpe, then turn at right angles and follow what is little more than a path towards the river. After walking for twenty minutes you will reach an old rotting wharf. Bear to the left through the trees and you will come to the creek and discover the derelict. You must depend on circumstances to get aboard. Don't let yourself be followed! Be careful to destroy this as soon as you have studied the directions I have given you.

Yours truly
John Armitage

Mary sat almost spellbound by her discovery. She made up her mind to act on her information as soon as possible, and find her way to the old derelict Armitage mentioned. Once she had reached it they would never send her back again, and she would be able to do her utmost to prevent Armitage going any further with his vengeance and, perhaps, even find a way of escape for them from their present difficulties. She copied down the directions to the hulk in a little note-book, putting them in such a way that nobody but she herself could read them; then, carrying the fragments of the letter to the grate, she set fire to them and watched until every piece was reduced to ashes. Even then she rubbed them until practically nothing remained. When this was done she went to bed.

"I wonder," she murmured just before she fell asleep, "what Inspector Leslie would say, if he guessed that I know where Mr. Armitage is!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE OUTWITTING OF LESLIE

Mary did not believe in letting the grass grow under her feet and, despite the lateness of the hour when she had eventually fallen asleep, she was up and dressed before eight o'clock. During breakfast she announced to Alice that she had decided to go away for a little while, and intended leaving the girl to look after the flat until her return.

"But, miss," protested Alice, "is it wise of you to go away by yourself? Why not take me with you and shut up the flat?"

"Not this time, Alice," replied Mary, "I prefer to be alone."

A look of understanding came into the maid's face.

"Very well, miss," she said. "Am I to know where you are going?"

"Weymouth," promptly answered Mary; she had been expecting the question. "I don't know where I shall stay yet," she added, "so keep all letters until you hear from me."

She took only one large suitcase and, despite the wrench it cost her, one hat. She afterwards said that it required more courage to make up her mind to leave all her hats but one behind, than to face any of the events of that exciting day. Before leaving the flat she looked through the curtain of one of the drawing-room windows and searched the road. There were several people passing by, but nobody who looked like a detective. She knew that the man, who had called on her in the middle of the night, must have gone off duty, but she felt perfectly certain that his relief was somewhere about. The taxicab she had ordered drove up to the door, and she smiled as she noticed a dark man, with detective

written all over him, appear from some hiding-place and stroll towards the car.

"He will be close by when I give directions to the driver," she murmured.

Two minutes later she was on her way to the taxi followed by Alice carrying her suitcase. She got in, gave the girl a few last minute instructions, then told her to direct the man to drive to Waterloo. As Alice did so the detective passed by — he had timed his arrival to a nicety. Mary looked through the window at the back of the car before it turned the corner and saw that the plainclothes man was engaged in conversation with her maid.

She had not quite decided on her course of action yet and, being thoroughly inexperienced in the ways of the police, she was rather worried what to do next. It suddenly occurred to her that her driver might be in the pay of the police, might even be a policeman himself — she had heard of such cases. Her original intention had been to redirect him once she was well away from her flat, but now she hesitated. Eventually she made up her mind to continue her journey to Waterloo, then go by underground to St. Pancras — she had plenty of time. It was thus she made her big mistake.

The first person she saw as she stepped out of the taxi was Detective Inspector Leslie, looking as smartly groomed and debonair as usual, and with a smile on his face that made her feel she hated him at that moment. The shock upset her so much that she almost felt faint. Her face changed colour and her knees seemed curiously weak. If he noticed her agitation he made no sign, but strolled up and raised his hat with that peculiar elegance which suited him so well, and which she had previously admired.

"I am in time then," he remarked pleasantly. "I was afraid I might miss you."

She made a frantic effort to smile, to speak naturally, and she succeeded very creditably.

"How did you know I — I was going away ?" she asked.

"A telephone message came through about ten minutes ago," he replied frankly. "One of my men happened to hear the directions given to your taxi-driver and he rang up to let me know. You see, he guessed I would like to see you off."

She frowned angrily.

"Why do you pretend ?" she demanded. "You have given orders to have me watched."

He did not look a bit perturbed.

"That is quite true," he admitted gravely. "Shall I pay the driver ? He seems to be expecting remuneration for bringing you across London; these fellows do, you know !"

She bit her lip, turned and paid the man, then swung back.

"I suppose he is one of your men, too," she said wrathfully. "I think you are perfectly horrid."

"No," he replied calmly; "he is not one of my men. I am sorry you are angry with me. Surely you don't object to my seeing you off when you are going on a journey ?"

Her brain was working furiously. What was she to do now ? Naturally he would wait and see her into a train for Weymouth, and she would be forced to go. But did he know she was supposed to be going to Weymouth — had Alice told the detective ! His next words put her mind at rest on that point.

"I don't know where you are going yet," he remarked.

"Oh !" she retorted, lifting her eyebrows in pretended surprise. "It is strange to find there is something you don't know."

He grinned boyishly, and she felt an irresistible desire to smile with him.

"You seem to have a very reticent maid," he observed. "My man asked her where you were going and she told him to mind his own business."

"Why should I tell you ?" she demanded.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"No reason at all I suppose," he answered. "Still as I have come to see you off, I am bound to know sooner or later."

She laughed. It was impossible to be angry for long with this calm individual. Besides, she decided, it would look less suspicious if she accepted his presence without any show of resentment. She was sorry she had not thought of that before.

"You really don't deserve to see me off," she declared, "but as you are here, you may stay. Find me a porter, please !"

His eyes twinkled and he beckoned to a porter near by. The latter picked up her bag and looked at her inquiringly.

"Where to, miss ?" he asked.

"Find me a first class compartment for Basingstoke please," she requested, marvelling at her own coolness.

She had noticed the word Basingstoke over one of the booking-office windows and it had occurred to her that a train going to that town would, in all probability, stop at several stations on the way down. This would enable her to alight quite soon and return to London.

"Very well, miss," replied the porter. "You've got ten minutes, miss — number six platform !"

He departed with the suitcase, and Mary took a pound note from her vanity bag, which she handed to Leslie.

"Please get my ticket for me," she begged.

"Are you really going ?" he asked.

"Of course I am ! Why ?"

"It's rather a waste of money, isn't it ?"

She paled again. What did he know ?

"What on earth are you talking about ?" she exclaimed.

"I didn't expect you to take a train from here at all," he remarked candidly. "In fact when I came to the station it was only to make sure. I was surprised when you turned up."

"Yet you say that your detective heard the directions that were given to the driver ?"

"So he did, but it would have been easy enough to tell him to go somewhere else afterwards."

"Really, Mr. Leslie," she said, "you are the most suspicious man I have ever met in my life. Please get the ticket or I will miss the train."

He smiled, and walked over to the booking-office. She strolled into the great teeming station feeling that she was matching herself against a man who seemed to be able to anticipate her every move, and who had an uncanny knack of reading her thoughts. Presently he rejoined her and they walked on to number six platform, where they found the porter waiting by an empty first class compartment reserved for ladies. Leslie handed her in and gave her the ticket and change.

"How long do you expect to be away ?" he asked with a mocking smile.

"It all depends," she replied. "Perhaps my aunt will not be able to put me up for very long."

"I am glad you are going to an aunt," he observed gravely. "It will be nice for you to have the companionship of a lady during your present trouble."

She looked at him searchingly — she felt very nearly certain that he was making fun of her. Presently a man passed by and looked keenly at her, then glanced at Leslie. She caught the merest flicker of an eyelid, but she was suddenly convinced that this man was another officer in plainclothes and that he was going to travel with her and watch her movements. Leslie himself had given no sign and went on talking cheerfully. The man got into a compartment a little way ahead. She suddenly felt very lonely and helpless, and tears of mortification sprang into her eyes, but she brushed them away quickly and tried to look unconcerned. A minute later the train began to move.

"Good-bye, Mr. Leslie," she said. "It was very nice of you to come and see me off."

"May I call to-night or to-morrow ?" he asked. "This train stops nearly everywhere, and I should get out at Surbiton or Woking if I were you. You'll catch a fast one back from Woking."

He raised his hat, and was gone. She sank back into her seat, feeling very miserable and inexperienced. For a long time she sat without movement, her hands clasped, her lips drawn tightly together. The train thundered through Battersea Park and Clapham Junction as though it were an express, but with a jarring of brakes it slowed up when approaching Wimbledon and came to a halt in the station. It was the stop that roused her from the feeling of despair into which she had fallen. She suddenly felt herself able to take a more cheerful view of things, and the determination to get the better of Leslie even now mounted in her until she was full of belief in her ability to succeed. The difficulty was to know what to do. She felt sure that the man who had looked at her so sharply was a police officer sent to watch her movements and, even if he were not, then she was certain there was a detective somewhere on the train. She stood up and looked out of the window. . . She felt no doubt now — the fellow was leaning out

of his compartment, and a quick glance up and down the train showed that nobody else was.

She sat down again and set to work with resolution to solve her problem. If she travelled as far as Basingstoke, she would only be followed and watched wherever she went, and it would be an awful waste of time. On the other hand if she got out at any of the intermediate stations, so would he unless she could dodge him and, at the moment, there seemed no hope of her being able to do that. If the train had only possessed corridor carriages, she might have stood a better chance. They were on the move again and time was passing. She glanced at the suitcase. What a pity it was she could not do without it !

Once more the train slowed down and ran into Surbiton. Again she looked out of the window with the same result as before. It was obviously impossible for her to alight at any station without being seen and she did not take the trouble to go through the same performance as they slackened speed again preparatory to stopping at Weybridge. There was a train standing in the station on the up line, and suddenly a daring idea sprang into her mind. Her heart seemed to jump into her mouth with the very hazard of it, but she did not hesitate; it seemed to her her only chance.

Quickly taking her suitcase from the rack, she crossed the compartment, opened the off door and, standing precariously on the footboard, closed it as gently as she could behind her, then dropped to the permanent way. As she did so she was conscious of the inquisitive stares of the people in the other train, some of whom were looking out of their windows with undisguised curiosity, but she had no time to wonder what they were thinking of her actions. Almost opposite to her was an empty third class compartment and, holding grimly on to the suitcase, she climbed up and managed somehow to get the door open. The next moment she was inside and had sunk weakly on to a seat, her heart racing wildly and her breath coming laboriously. But she was not certain yet that she was safe. She closed the door and looked cautiously out. To her relief there was no sign that the detective had noticed her manœuvre, and almost immediately she received confirmation that

he had not. The train she was in backed some distance down the station, for some reason or other, then drew out, and she had a view of her shadower's back as he leaned out of his compartment watching the platform on the other side.

She felt free from espionage at last and, when she had recovered from her ordeal, she set to work to plan her future actions. She determined to get out of the train at Wimbledon, and make the rest of the journey by taxicab. But at Wimbledon she had a narrow escape of being detained for inquiries. When the train stopped she picked up her case and was about to step out when the guard accosted her. Apparently somebody had informed him of her escapade at Weybridge.

"Did you get out of the ten-twelve down on to the lines, and into this train, miss ?" he asked severely.

"Yes," she replied rather nervously.

"What was your game ?"

"I wanted to get back to London."

"A mighty strange way to go about it."

"I suppose it was, but I thought I — I would miss the train if I went round by the bridge."

He shook his head.

"I'm afraid it won't do," he said. "Harry !" he called to a passing porter, "call the station master, will you ?"

That important official came bustling up almost at once.

"What's the matter ?" he asked.

The guard told him the story and he looked at Mary very gravely. She suddenly became aware that a row of heads was craning out of the carriage windows watching the scene with interest, and she flushed with self-consciousness.

"Can't we go somewhere where there is no audience ?" she asked.

"Come along to my office, miss," directed the station master. "All right, Sullivan," he added to the guard, "I'll look into this."

The latter nodded his head and turned away.

Mary accompanied the station master to his office and accepted the chair he offered her. He was a benevolent-looking man and she became more hopeful as she studied his face. She repeated the reason she had given to the guard for her action.

"I suppose it was very silly of me," she added, "but I was terribly anxious to get back to London, and it seemed the only way."

"It was an extremely risky thing to do," he remarked. "Were you carrying that suitcase with you ?"

She nodded.

"I can't imagine how you did it," he went on, "handicapped by a thing like that. You are either very brave or very foolish, young lady."

"I'm not brave," she replied, and smiled.

"Where were you going ?" he asked.

"To Basingstoke !"

"May I see your ticket ?"

She handed him the white piece of cardboard, and he examined it. Then he looked searchingly at her. She was obviously a lady and a very lovely one he thought; she certainly did not look capable of committing a crime.

"I see no cause," he said after a moment or two, "for us to detain you if you give me your address; and, of course, you must pay your fare from Weybridge to this station."

She sighed with relief and handed him a card. There was no reason why she should not give him her address. She accepted the receipt for the fare with a little smile.

"I am so sorry," she apologized, "for having given you this trouble."

"It is no trouble, miss," he said, "but take my advice: don't do anything like this again ! Apart from the suspicion you bring on yourself, you are risking your life."

He sent for a porter to carry her bag to a taxi and a few minutes later she was on her way, ostensibly to the underground station at Hammersmith. When she was well away from Wimbledon, she stopped the taxi and asked the driver if he would take her to St. Pancras.

"It will save me a lot of time," she added in coaxing tones.

"Bless your heart, miss," was the gallant reply, "I'd drive you to the North Pole."

"What a nice man !" she murmured, as the car moved on again. "But, oh, my dear Mary," she added with introspective severity,

"what a lot of untruths you've told to-day. This sort of thing must stop, my child !"

When she arrived at St. Pancras she found, to her delight, that there was a train leaving for Tilbury in a little over half an hour. It was not yet noon, but she felt hungry and went to the dining-room where she had an early lunch. She was very happy as she sat in the train on her way to Tilbury, and the ugly country through which she was passing depressed her not at all. Her greatest joy came from the knowledge that she had actually succeeded in outwitting Inspector Leslie, and she smiled to herself with glee when she thought of the detective who would have continued his journey to Basingstoke quite unconscious that his quarry had eluded him.

She obtained another taxi at Tilbury and was driven to Crackenthorpe where she alighted outside the village general shop, which was also the post office and local garage. Here another problem confronted her: how was she to set out for the old wharf without curious eyes observing her, and general interest in the village roused by the sight of a young, fashionably-dressed lady carrying a suitcase and walking in a direction where there was nothing but a rotting wharf. Eventually she decided to risk it; there were only two or three people about and perhaps they would not notice her. She went into the shop and bought some stamps, not because she wanted them, but because she had caught sight of an old lady behind the counter, watching her with a certain amount of curiosity.

"This is a quaint little village," she remarked conversationally.

"It is very quiet, miss," replied the old lady. "You haven't come to live here, have you ?"

"Oh, no," declared Mary, preparing her conscience for another equivocation. "My brother is interested in the development of some land near here and I have come to meet him. He is going to show it to me, then I am returning to Westcliffe with him."

The postmistress nodded.

"There's quite a lot of money to be made in these parts," she said, "if you don't mind spending a lot to start with. Will you come in and wait for your brother in the parlour ?"

"No; thank you very much," replied Mary, "I'll stroll down

towards the river — the land is that way, I know — and wait for him. It's such a lovely day."

"Well, I'll look after the suitcase for you, miss, if you like."

"I must take that," said the girl; "it has a lot of his plans in it and it's not heavy."

The old lady apparently accepted the story without any suspicion, and Mary left the shop and walked on towards the river. This time there was nobody about at all, but she purposely dallied as though waiting for somebody, until she was out of sight of the village, then she hurried her steps.

As she went along the bag seemed to become heavier and heavier, and her arms and head began to ache. It was a warm day and soon she was covered with perspiration. Every now and again she was compelled to rest, but at last she reached the old wharf. She sighed with relief and satisfaction; the small wood on the left gave her a feeling of great comfort. She made her way through the trees and, after another quarter of an hour's toil, found herself looking at the most desolate scene she thought she had ever set eyes on.

CHAPTER XX

MARY SPEAKS PLAINLY

In front of her was a backwater of the River Thames now practically all mud except for little pools of water left by the outgoing tide. On the other side of the creek the shore was bleak and gloomy, its flat ugliness relieved only by a few stunted trees which seemed to have been affected by the general and inhospitable sterility. There was not a habitation to be seen as far as the eye could reach, and the only vegetation, apart from the miserable-looking trees, was a mass of rank, fetid weeds.

To her right, in the distance, she could see the river, and about two hundred yards down the inlet lay the old deserted vessel for which she was in search. It must have been a large ship at one time to judge from the size of the hull, but now, lying in the mud without masts or spars and with its oak timbers showing several cavities and crevices, it looked excessively depressing.

The prevailing loneliness made Mary feel a little bit dismayed, and her courage began to ebb, but she had won through so far that she refused to be daunted now. The great difficulty was to find her way on board, and there was always the possibility that when she got there, if she ever did, she would find the hulk deserted. It was out of the question to walk across to it, the mud would probably be so viscous that she would in all likelihood sink into it and be unable to move more than a few yards. But there must be a way of getting on board — it was ridiculous to think that Armitage and the men with him only went on, or came off, when the tide was in. She noticed that the derelict was much nearer to the other shore than to her side and, after a few minutes' hesitation, she started to walk up the creek in the hope that she would find a

place where she could cross. It was over half an hour before she was able to pass safely to the other side, and she was thoroughly fatigued and breathless, but with renewed hope she commenced to trudge down towards the hulk.

At last she arrived abreast of it and was gratified to find that it was not more than fifty yards from her, but the mud was still in the way and she sat on her suitcase to rest and make up her mind what to do. There was not a sign of life on the craft and she became very dubious. How terrible it would be, she thought, if they had deserted the derelict and gone somewhere else. All her exertion and trouble would be in vain. Suddenly she heard an exclamation behind her, and swung round to find a man staring at her as though he saw a ghost. He was tall and powerful-looking, with protruding teeth and piercing, black eyes. As soon as he got over his first shock at seeing her, an ugly look came into his face that frightened her.

"What are you doing here ?" he demanded harshly.

"I have come to see Mr. Armitage," she said with more composure than she felt. She was taking a risk in mentioning names, she knew, but she was certain that this fellow was one of the gang.

He started involuntarily and came closer to her.

"What do you know about Armitage ?" he snarled.

"I know that he is on that boat, and I have come to join him and my brother."

"Your brother ?"

"Yes. Sydney Fulcher."

He muttered an oath, and seemed undecided what to do.

"The best thing to do with you," he said at last, "would be to twist your neck, but if you're really Fulcher's sister, I suppose I'd better take you on board and let Armitage deal with you. How many others besides you know his whereabouts ?"

"Nobody."

"I hope you're right for your own sake," he growled. "Follow me, and walk carefully !"

He made no attempt to carry her bag for her, so she picked it up and kept as close to his heels as she could, endeavouring, as far as she was able, to place her feet on the impressions made by his.

Apparently he knew a way to the derelict where the mud was firmer than elsewhere, for there was no particular difficulty in getting across except for an occasional soft patch when she felt her shoes squelching. As they drew near she found that the old boat was in an even more decayed state than she had supposed, most of the hull looking as if it were in the last stages of ruination; in fact it appeared as though a touch would cause it to crumble to pieces.

When they stood alongside, her companion gave a low whistle. Almost immediately a rope ladder was let down and she was gruffly commanded to climb up. She had never tried to scale a rope ladder before but, nothing daunted, she made an attempt. She found it impossible with her suitcase of course; however, he took it roughly from her, and she at last reached the top and drew herself over the rotting bulwarks. She was greeted by an exclamation of absolute surprise from a little rat of a man who squinted at her with such a ludicrous expression on his face that she felt inclined to laugh.

"Blimy !" he exclaimed. "Where the 'ell did *you* come from ?"

Before she had time to reply the fellow below had called to him and asked for a rope to be let down. To this the suitcase was tied and hauled up. A moment later her escort stood on the deck and the rope ladder was drawn up. In spite of the fact that her head and limbs ached, and she was absolutely tired out, Mary was full of satisfaction. She had accomplished what she had set out to do, and she never even thought what the result of her escapade might be.

"Who's the skirt, Frenchy ?" asked the little man.

The other did not reply but, taking Mary roughly by the arm, he led her to a door under the poop deck. Pulling it open, he thrust her inside and, to her amazement, she found herself in a comfortably-furnished room in perfect condition, showing not the slightest sign of the dilapidation so prevalent throughout the rest of the ancient vessel. Two men had looked up at her entry and, when they saw who it was, they started to their feet in blank astonishment. One was Armitage, the other her brother, and the expressions on their faces were characteristic. Sydney's face had turned pale; Armitage's eyes had narrowed and his lips had drawn

together in a straight, grim line. For a moment or two they stood looking at her; then Mary spoke.

"I hope you are glad to see me," she said.

"What are you doing here ?" asked Armitage harshly, "and how did you find out where we were ?"

Without waiting for an answer, he suddenly swung round on Fulcher, and the devil looked out of his eyes for the moment.

"Is it you we have to thank for this ?" he snapped.

Mary answered before her brother had time to open his mouth.

"It is nothing to do with Sydney," she declared, and there was a trace of contempt in her tone. "I have come because I wanted to be with my brother, and for another reason which I am not prepared to divulge at the moment."

"You are spying on behalf of the police, I suppose," sneered Armitage.

She drew herself up proudly and looked him straight in the eyes.

"Only a coward would say a thing like that," she retorted. "I am not spying on behalf of the police. It has taken me a great deal of time, and a certain amount of risk, to shake them off."

"I found her sitting opposite the boat," put in "Frenchy" Smith. "She told me she had come to join you and her brother."

Armitage nodded curtly.

"Do you mind if I sit down ?" asked Mary. "I am terribly tired."

Sydney pushed across a chair for her and she sank gratefully into it. He was still pale, but a deep affection shone in his eyes.

"Why did you do it, Mary ?" he asked.

"Because I couldn't bear to be alone any longer," she replied, "knowing that you were in danger. Since you wouldn't stop with me, I came to you — I can, at least, share your risks."

His gentle touch on her shoulder was almost a caress.

"But how did you know where to find me ?" he inquired.

"I will tell you all about it presently," she answered, "but I give you my word that nobody else knows."

Armitage's harsh voice broke into their conversation.

"Are you perfectly certain, madam," he asked, "that the police have not followed you ?"

"Absolutely," she assured him. "You are as safe now as you were before I came."

He threw himself back into his chair.

"Look here, guv'nor," interposed "Frenchy" Smith; "aren't you taking that young woman's word a bit too easy. How do you know she hasn't betrayed us ?"

She looked him up and down with the greatest scorn, and he shuffled uneasily from one foot to the other.

"You probably would do that sort of thing if it paid you," she remarked. "I don't !"

He scowled and was about to retort, when Armitage stopped him.

"I am the judge of that," he said. "You can get out, Smith."

"What about her bag ?" asked the man sulkily. "Shall I bring it in here ?"

"What bag ?" repeated Armitage in surprise.

"I brought a suitcase along," she announced calmly, "with some clothes in it. I couldn't very well stay here without clothes, could I ?"

"Who the dickens said you were going to stay here ?" he exploded.

"Well, it wouldn't be safe to send me back now, would it ? And think how useful I can be to you — a woman can do such a lot of things that a man can't !"

He turned abruptly to "Frenchy" and ordered him to bring in the suitcase. Not a word was spoken until the fellow had dropped the bag on the floor and made his departure; then Armitage looked at Mary and his cold eyes chilled her a little.

"I haven't made up my mind what to do with you yet," he remarked sternly, "but it would be as well if you explained your presence here before we go any further."

Sydney returned to his chair and watched her fixedly all the time she was telling her story. She omitted nothing, starting from the time she had pieced together the torn letter, and describing every event of her exciting day until "Frenchy" Smith had found her sitting on her suitcase. The only time she was interrupted was right at the beginning when she spoke about the letter. Armitage had turned on Fulcher and abused him passionately for

his carelessness, but Sydney had not replied, merely biting his lip in resentment.

When she had concluded the account of her adventures, Armirage had apparently forgotten all about his anger. His face was still cold and stern, but he looked at her with a new interest.

"Would you mind explaining," he said deliberately, "why you took all this risk ?"

"I wanted to try to save my brother, and you," she replied quietly, "from the consequences of your actions; and, if possible, prevent you from going any further."

His eyebrows were raised slightly.

"I can understand your desire," he observed, "with regard to your brother, but fail to see how you are in any way concerned with my doings."

"I once admired you greatly," she said without any trace of embarrassment, "during your cricket days, when you were a man of ideals and honour. I still think there must remain in your heart somewhere a little of your old character. I want to help you to fight your present malevolence and find your true self again."

He rose to his feet impatiently and stood looking down at her with unconcealed hostility.

"Since when," he asked cuttingly, "have you been appointed as my guardian angel ? You take a great deal upon yourself, madam, and I warn you that, if you in any way interfere with my plans, I will not show the slightest consideration either for your sex or age. You have interfered in matters that do not concern you and you will have to take the consequences of your own misguided actions."

"Pardon me," she returned coolly, "I do not agree that I am interfering in matters which don't concern me. My brother's honour concerns me very deeply. You have inveigled him into this criminal scheme of yours simply because you found him in the convict prison of Dartmoor, and thought that he would suit your purpose. You didn't worry whether he had any near relatives who loved him, did you ? You did not think of anything except your childish and selfish plans for vengeance ! What did it matter to you that you were damning other immortal souls as well as your own ?"

He laughed harshly but his face remained grim and forbidding.

"Don't prate to me of immortal souls," he cried. "What has God ever done for me that I should bother about the soul he has given me to save. I told you once before that your brother joined me of his own accord — he is being well paid and his risk is infinitesimal — "

"It was pretty great last night," she interrupted.

"That was his own fault. He should have torn up the note I sent him, then he would not have had to go back to destroy it."

"I think," she retorted, "that you were to blame in the first place. If you had been as careful as you should have been, you wouldn't have put anything on paper at all."

"I agree with you there," he admitted. "Certainly I should have been saved an impertinent visit from an interfering female."

She flushed and her eyes became more beautiful than ever in her sudden anger. She stood up and faced him.

"You coward!" she cried. "I am beginning to discover my mistake at last. I felt sorry for you; tried to understand your point of view; thought that, in my sympathy, I could help to heal your wounds. But now I know you for what you are. You are just contemptible; a criminal, not only in desire but in mind and heart. And furthermore," she added, her voice rising with the vehemence of her denunciation, "let me tell you that it was not so much for the sake of my brother that I came here today, as for your sake — it doesn't matter why. I have done things that I would never dare do under other circumstances; lied and hated myself for the necessity of lying. And I arrive to find myself trampled on by a coward, treated with scorn and contempt, and told that I am impertinent and an interfering female. And you," she cried, turning on her brother, who was now on his feet watching her with wide-open eyes, "you stand by and listen to this man's words without making an effort to defend me. Oh, Sydney, how can you be such a traitor to me?"

He started to speak, but she swung back to Armitage.

"Now you know what I think of you," she added in a quieter voice, an ineffable scorn in her tone. "I tried not to think things like that — I felt that there was a better nature hidden somewhere. But I know that I am wrong. Before your conviction you were

spoken of as a man of good character; of nobility, honour, and integrity. Probably you were — because you had never been tried. As soon as misfortune overtook you, what happened? What became of your manliness? Your strength of character? It all went and you sank to the level of an absolute worm. All you could babble about was vengeance — you forgot such things as honour, nobility, and integrity. Would a man who had those three attributes have gone down without a fight, without an attempt to keep his personality unsullied by the bitter adversities he was called upon to endure? Would your father who, I have been told, was a shining example of an English gentleman, have sunk to the depths of degradation as you have? Oh, Mr. Armitage, you have given me the most painful disappointment I have ever had in my life. It is hard to realize that the man I once admired for his qualities is nothing but a coward, a brute, and a bully!"

During the whole of her denunciation, Armitage remained facing her, hardly moving a muscle except when his father was mentioned. Now he watched her heaving bosom and flashing eyes, and there seemed to be an indefinable change in his demeanour somehow, but his face still remained hard and cold. Presently he spoke.

"I have never before been called either a coward, a bully, or a brute," he remarked quietly. "The terms may be deserved; they may not. Perhaps nobody else would dare to use them, but a woman. I wish that I had never seen your brother or you, and if my plans miscarry in any way I shall know where to put the blame." He turned to Sydney. "Fulcher," he went on, "while your sister remains as our guest she can have my room. See that she has her meals served in there and I hold you responsible for her. She is not to be seen on deck during the daytime and I insist that she is locked in at night."

"You needn't bother to lock me in," she said quickly. "I have no intention of going back now I am here. I suppose you will accept my word of honour that I will not try to get away?"

"I am surprised at your asking me," he commented, "but I am certainly prepared to accept your word. Very well, Fulcher, there will be no necessity to lock the door."

He turned away abruptly.

"Just a minute!" she called. "Would it be impertinent on my part to ask what you have done with Sir Fellowes Allen?"

For a moment he stood without moving, then:

"You shall see him for yourself," he said. "Come with me!"

He opened the door and stood aside to let her pass out.

"Kindly bend down," he directed, "so that you cannot be seen from the shore."

She obeyed his instructions and he led her to a hatchway down which he helped her. At the bottom was a lantern. He lit it and went along a dark passage which smelt of rotting wood and decay. She shuddered as she followed him. Presently he unlocked a door and they entered a long, low room which appeared to be full of ancient lockers. He held the lantern up so that she could see into every corner of the cabin.

"This is my prisoner," he announced.

Sitting in the middle of the floor was an old man, dressed in a suit of rough clothes which reminded her of those worn by the convicts at Dartmoor. He had a great bundle of tarred rope by his side and appeared to be engaged in unwinding it. He looked up at her with an expression of surprise on his face, and she noticed that he looked pale and ill, though his eyes shone with courage.

"This is the nearest I can do," went on Armitage, "towards reproducing prison life for the benefit of this man. He is dressed, as you see, in a replica of a suit of broad arrows; he is engaged in picking oakum, and he has meals of a similar kind to those I had to put up with for ten years. Unfortunately I cannot reproduce the real degradation of prison life."

"How cruel of you!" she exclaimed.

"Probably you think so — I don't!"

"How long is this tomfoolery to last, Armitage?" asked Sir Fellowes suddenly and feebly. "I have been here like this for two days now, and I am afraid that my strength will not stand much more of it."

"You will stay here," replied Armitage harshly, "until the others are in my power; then, as I informed you before, you will be taken

somewhere where you will probably find you will have to remain for the rest of your life."

"Is there nothing I can say to make you alter your mind ?"

"Nothing !"

"May I request you to put me in a place where I can get a little fresh air. The atmosphere is appalling down here ?"

"You will stay where you are," snapped Armitage. "That is enough !"

"Then do your worst !" shouted the old man vehemently. "I defy you !"

"Come !" said Armitage shortly to the girl, and strode away.

She gave the old judge a smile of sympathy before she went and he seemed to understand, for he bravely returned her smile. Without a word the ex-convict led Mary back to the cabin to which she had first been taken. When they were in that comfortable-looking apartment, he turned to her inquiringly.

"You now know what I have done with Sir Fellowes Allen," he remarked. "Have you any further scorn to pour upon me ?"

"It doesn't seem much use, does it ?" she returned. "I am going to appeal to your better nature instead."

"From what you recently said," he retorted caustically, "I should imagine that I have no better nature."

"Nevertheless I am going to make an attempt to find out if there is a spark of it left. My appeal refers to Sir Fellowes Allen."

"Nothing you can say — " he commenced angrily, but she held up her hand.

"It is a very little thing," she pleaded; "please listen to me ! I want to ask you to let him sit under the open hatchway where we descended. He will get light and air there. After all you were always in light and airy places when you were in Dartmoor. You didn't have to cling hard to life in a foul, vermin-infested hole; and you were young, he is old. He will die if he remains there much longer, and then you will be just as guilty of murder as though you had stabbed him."

He stood for several minutes frowning irritably, then shrugged his shoulders.

"It will always mean placing a man to watch him," he said.

"Why not put him on his parole ?"

He turned on her viciously.

"Did they put me on my parole at Dartmoor ?" he stormed. "Fulcher," he added, "go and tell Smith to put the prisoner under the open hatchway with Summers to guard him. He'll have to go back to the other place at night."

Fulcher departed on his errand and Armitage flung open the door on the right-hand side of the room.

"This will be your bedroom for the time being," he announced.

She looked into the place with deep interest. Like the outer room the walls were oak-panelled and the floor covered by a carpet. A small brass bedstead stood in the centre, and there was a dressing-table with the usual appurtenances, a washstand, and a small bookcase full of books, as well as three chairs.

"I'll remove my things," he said, "and you'll be quite comfortable."

For a moment there was almost a human note in his voice. She noticed it and was glad.

"What about you ?" she asked.

"I'll sleep in this room," he replied shortly.

Involuntarily she looked at the door. He caught the glance.

"There is a key," he observed coldly; "you can lock yourself in !"

She flushed hotly.

"I wasn't thinking of anything like that," she protested.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll leave you now," he remarked. "I'll send you in some tea in half an hour."

"Where does Sydney sleep ?" she asked.

"Up forward with the others," he replied. "I had a large room fitted up for their convenience."

Without another word he turned and left her. She entered the bedroom and closed the door, then sat down to think.

"Oh, I do hope I win," she said to herself softly. "There is still a chance !"

CHAPTER XXI

A MUTUAL HATE SOCIETY

Life on board an old derelict, especially one which has probably been lying in the mud for decades, is not calculated to be ideal. Mary found that out for herself before she had been on board the hulk more than a few hours.

Her room was nicely furnished and comfortable, but it was not very large, and she had received strict orders not to go on deck in case of the remote possibility of somebody turning up in that deserted neighbourhood and taking an interest in the old boat. She found herself, therefore, more or less confined to her cabin, which was not at all to her liking. She had made her adventurous trip to Armitage's hiding place with the intention of setting to work to cleanse his mind of all thoughts of vengeance, and of rescuing her brother from what might eventually lead to a life of crime. Her reception would probably have daunted most girls, but not so Mary. The years that she had spent under the roof of a man who did not understand girl children and, in fact, was only concerned with his own selfish money-making projects, had taught her to rely upon herself when very young, with the result that her naturally strong character had been developed at an age when other children hardly realize that they possess such a quality.

After Armitage had left her alone in the cabin which he had handed over to her, she tried to recall any little remark or look of his which might suggest that his old-time disposition was not altogether dead, but she had great difficulty in remembering anything — the merest trifle of a belated courtesy here and there perhaps; nothing else. The whole nature of the man was hard, cynical, and merciless, and if she had not known from reports and

stories treasured up from her girlhood days that he had been, at one time, altogether different, she would have felt sure that he had always been a misanthrope. There was only one little incident that encouraged her in her hope of being able to work a miracle and that was the fact that he had agreed to her request that Sir Fellowes Allen be moved to a place where he could get fresh air and sunlight. But that, after all, was a poor sort of concession to base her ambitions on, for Armitage had in all probability only consented in the fear that the retired judge would die in the awful hole in which he was confined.

If Mary had been asked why she was so interested in the reformation of the ex-convict she would, no doubt, have replied that it was partially for the reason that he had once been a hero of hers and she could never bring herself to believe that he had been guilty of the crime and its unsavoury adjuncts, and partially because of her fear for her brother. It never occurred to her that there was a warmer feeling behind it all; a feeling which dated from the day that he had attempted to make his escape from prison. As a matter of fact, Mary's romantic heart had been very much touched by his deplorable plight on that occasion, and she had then caught a glimpse of the bruised torn soul of the man underneath the hard exterior — a glimpse which she still remembered. When she discovered that the prisoner, whom she would fain have rescued, was her onetime hero, Armitage the cricketer, her heart went out to him more than ever. Despite his harshness, his apparent cruelty, his bitter cynicism, Mary Fulcher was very nearly in love with John Armitage.

She was brought a neatly served tea at a few minutes after five, and she felt badly in need of it. The man who carried in the tray was the same little Cockney who had been so startled by her appearance on board and, after placing his burden on the dressing-table, he stood and looked at her for a few moments without speaking.

"Do you want anything ?" she asked at last.

"I do that, miss," he answered, shuffling his feet uneasily, but nevertheless managing to convey a suggestion of menace in his tone. "I wants ter know wot yer doin' 'ere, an' if the busies know you've come."

"I presume," she replied calmly, "that you are referring to the police. If so I can assure you that they have not the slightest knowledge where I am."

"Well, wot 'ave yer come fer ?" he asked.

"That is my own business," she retorted, "and has nothing whatever to do with you."

"Oh, yes it 'as, see !" he snarled. "It 'as a lot ter do wiv me and my mates. We ain't goin' ter risk gettin' in the jug agine fer a bloomin' skirt, I can tell yer. If you can find the 'ulk, so can a lot of people."

"Will you please go !" she requested with perfect coolness. "Mr. Armitage is not exactly pleased to see me here, but I am sure he would not allow me to be insulted."

"Insulted be blowed !" snorted Curly. "I 'ave a right ter say wot I fink, ain't I ?"

"You've no right to be in here at all," interposed a harsh voice, and Armitage strode into the room.

He caught the little man by his shoulder and swung him round.

"Who sent you ?" he demanded.

" 'Er brother," replied Summers sullenly, "leastwise the bloke wot calls 'isself 'er brother. 'E was makin' the tea an' 'e asked me ter tike 'ers to 'er."

"He's a fool !" snapped Armitage. "I should have thought he knew better than to send you into a lady's room. Well, listen ! Don't ever come near this lady again while she is in our company ! Do you understand ?"

"I s'pose yer wants 'er orl ter yerself," muttered Summers.

He was sorry he spoke. Armitage's eye flashed fire, and in a moment he had picked the fellow up as though he were a baby and flung him out of the cabin. There was a crash as he landed on the floor of the other room.

"I — I hope you haven't hurt him," cried Mary fearfully.

"I hope I have," was the grim reply.

"O-oh !" she gasped; she felt incapable of saying more.

"If he annoys you again," said Armitage curtly, "let me know !"

He turned away, and she jumped up from the bed.

"Just a minute," she ventured. "I — I want to thank you for — "

"Don't bother !" he interrupted stiffly. "I can get along without your gratitude quite well. If you had remained in your proper environment, you would not have subjected yourself to insults."

She was left alone trying to stifle the hot resentment which his words had engendered. For a long time she found it very difficult, but at last her sense of humour came to the rescue and she laughed. The tea was not very appetizing but it was very comforting and, by the time she had finished, she was able to remember that Armitage had done her a service and to forget his churlish behaviour.

She saw nobody until nearly ten o'clock, when her brother brought her a meal made up practically of tinned food, and deposited a lamp on the washstand.

"I'm sorry," he apologized, "but this is the best we can do for you."

"Sydney," she cried reproachfully, "why haven't you been to see me since I arrived ?"

"I couldn't come," he said rather shamefacedly. "I was on guard over Allen first, then I had to cook the supper."

"Couldn't Mr. Armitage send me a lamp ?"

"He is ashore, and I quite forgot," he muttered. "There's been a lot of unpleasantness over you," he added resentfully. "Why on earth did you come ?"

"I felt I had to," she replied simply.

"Well, if it hadn't been for Armitage," he said, "I might have been in queer street. 'Frenchy' Smith and 'Curly' Summers, the only two who are on board at present, are pretty well the toughest fellows with us, and they demanded to know how you found out where we were. Armitage told them that he knew, but would keep the information to himself. He assured them that they had nothing to fear. If he had said that it was through me, anything might have happened."

"It was nice of him not to," she observed. "He came to my rescue this afternoon also when you sent in that awful little man with my tea. Sydney, what were you thinking of when you did that ?"

"Oh, don't keep on for Goodness' sake !" complained Fulcher

pettishly. "Armitage made me feel pretty sick about it, and Curly swears he'll be even with you."

"Does he ?" she said. "Did he make use of threats like that in your hearing ?"

He nodded.

"What did you do ?"

"What could I do ? Told him to shut up, of course."

Her lips curled with scorn.

"Sydney," she sighed, "I wish you were half the man Mr. Armitage is."

He scowled at her.

"You won't give me much chance, will you ?" he muttered.

"On the contrary," she remarked quietly, "I am giving you every chance."

He turned away from her towards the door.

"Everything has gone wrong," he said, "since you mixed yourself up in this business. If you weren't my sister, I'd say a great deal more to you than Armitage has done."

"You wouldn't have the courage," she retorted.

He went out abruptly, but was back almost at once.

"You can go on deck now if you like," he informed her, and was gone.

She promptly availed herself of the permission and went out to find a very clear night with myriads of stars piercing the darkness, as though the glory of heaven had found innumerable rents in the canopy of the sky and was shining through. Everything was wonderfully peaceful and still, and even the rotting wood only seemed to have an old world odour now, with nothing unpleasant about it. The surrounding desolation was invisible, and Mary might have been in a little ethereal cosmos of her own, floating between heaven and earth, so calm and silent was it.

She found infinite pleasure in being alone with her thoughts, and she leaned against the old bulwarks for nearly an hour, entirely lost to everything round her, her mind buried in reflections both sad and sanguine. The cold chill in the air eventually brought her back to the realization of human necessities, but she was loath to go in. She compromised by returning to the cabin for a Spanish shawl she had brought with her; with this wrapped

round her slim body she returned to the deck and this time found an old, brokendown windlass to sit on. Almost immediately she was deep in meditation again, and time, once more, seemed to stand still. An hour, two hours passed by, then she sat up and looked about her with surprise. She had fallen asleep! Suddenly she flushed. It must be very late, and probably Mr. Armitage had gone to bed long ago. How would she be able to get into her cabin? She hardly liked the idea of going through his room while he was lying there asleep.

While considering her new problem with puckered brows, she became aware of a soft, lapping sound which puzzled her considerably until, looking over the side, she saw to her astonishment that the hulk was surrounded by water. Apparently the tide was in. How nice it looked, she thought, with the gentle little ripples glistening in the starshine and weaving the most delicate patterns! She almost became lost in her contemplation of this fresh attraction, but her enjoyment was interrupted by the sound of a high-powered motor boat which seemed to be approaching the derelict. She began to feel alarmed. Was it possible that the police had after all traced Armitage to his lair and were now coming to capture him? She listened intently, Yes; the sound was getting louder every minute. Then someone came up softly almost to her side.

"Hullo!" murmured her brother's voice. "Aren't you in bed yet?"

She ignored his unnecessary question.

"Do you hear the sound of a motor boat?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes," he replied. "It is Armitage coming back."

"Oh!" she exclaimed with relief. "I thought it might be the police."

Apparently the engine was shut off at that moment for there was dead silence. A few seconds later the motor boat came gliding alongside and there was a low whistle. Fulcher hurried to the bulwarks and let over the rope ladder, then he came back to Mary.

"You'd better go in," he said. "They might think you are spying on them."

She walked away reluctantly but stood by the entrance to the

cabin wondering if Armitage had abducted somebody else. She saw three shadows, darker than the surrounding gloom, appear over the side, then came the sound of the motor engine again, at first loud and staccato, but quickly growing muffled as the speedy vessel rapidly drew away in the distance. She still lingered as she heard her brother speak, not through idle curiosity — eavesdropping was anathema to her — but because she felt she must know if Armitage had succeeded in his designs once more.

"No luck to-night ?" queried Fulcher in a low voice, but quite loud enough for her to hear.

"No," came in Armitage's sharp tones. "Humphreys is going to be a trouble, I'm afraid. There is a detective outside the house, another in the hall, and one sleeping in his dressing-room. I suppose that's Leslie's doing."

"Or Humphreys' himself," growled another voice. "That bird's as cute as they make 'em, and he ain't taking any risks. Where's Curly and Frenchy ?"

"In bed," replied Fulcher shortly.

"The boss told me your sister's come aboard," went on the other voice. "I hope she's safe as he makes out. Don't know that I'd ever trust a woman myself."

Mary stopped to hear no more. Somehow she was absurdly pleased to know that Armitage had described her as being safe. She got into bed feeling happier than she had done for some time.

Two days went by and Mary saw very little of the man whom the others called the "Boss." He seemed to keep to himself a great deal and, whenever she did meet him, he was as curt and cold as ever. The others quickly came to accept her presence on the hulk as a matter of course, and even "Curly" Summers tried to be polite if he met her, which was seldom. Of them all the only one who, in any way, appealed to her was Steve Hardy, the jewel thief. He spent an hour in conversation with her when she had come on deck on the second night and rather impressed her by his gentlemanly and modulated address. She was surprised by his intimate knowledge of the world. He seemed to have travelled nearly everywhere on the civilized globe, and was a most interesting raconteur. He spoke of his

many successful jewel robberies without the slightest trace of remorse or shame and, in fact, rather gloried in them than otherwise. Apparently he had mixed in the best society and, wherever he had gone, had left women bewailing the loss of some valuable jewellery.

On the fourth day of her self-imposed confinement on the old vessel, Mary rose early and sat on her bed waiting for breakfast. It was usually brought to her by her brother, but on this particular morning he was later than usual. She had discovered several novels in the bookcase which had appealed to her and, always an avid reader, had already finished two of them. She was now starting on a third, and had read two or three chapters, when there was a knock on the door.

"Come in!" she called, taking it for granted that it was her brother.

Her astonishment was great, therefore, when the door opened and she saw Armitage standing on the threshold.

"Your brother is down with a bilious attack," he said; "nothing to worry about, but he can't bring you your breakfast. As I have given orders that none of the other men are to enter your room with meals, I think you had better breakfast with me this morning."

He turned away without waiting for any reply and she bit her lip with annoyance at his churlish way of speaking to her. At first she was tempted to refuse to take the meal with him, but if she did she would be defeating her own object. She presently walked into the outer cabin, therefore, as though she had in no way resented his tone.

A small table, laid for two, had been placed in the centre of the room, and he held a chair for her to sit on. This was an unexpected courtesy and she noted it very carefully in her mind, where she was storing up even the smallest items that might show that he was becoming just a little different. She resolved to be as friendly and as pleasant as she could, no matter how he treated or spoke to her.

"It is very nice of you to think of me like this," she said.

He merely grunted and, after a while, she tried again.

"May I go and see my brother after breakfast?" she asked.

"Yes, if you like," he replied. "But bend low when you pass along the deck."

She promised to be careful and for some time there was silence. It is very difficult to speak to a man who shows no desire to listen to one. The food was brought in by Smith and left on a side table from which they had to help themselves, and Mary suddenly conceived a happy idea. She was slightly nearer to the side table than he, and presently she took it upon herself to act as waitress whenever he required anything. At first he did not appear to notice what she was doing, but when, at last, he became aware of it, he frowned at her.

"I don't remember asking you to wait on me," he remonstrated.

She smiled sweetly.

"Why shouldn't I ?" she asked. "I am nearer the side table than you. Besides I like doing it."

The frown gradually disappeared from his forehead and he found himself staring at her. At that moment Armitage began to realize — dimly it is true, but still realize — that there was something in life that he was missing badly. He saw before him for the first time, with eyes from which the scales had temporarily fallen, a very beautiful young girl; but he beheld something more — he found himself contemplating a pair of glorious eyes in which purity and truth shone triumphant. There was something else there as well, more difficult to divine. It was faith !

He suddenly became aware that a faint rosy tinge was stealing into her neck and face, and he recovered himself. He realized that he had been staring at her like a lout.

I beg your pardon, Miss Fulcher," he said, in the most natural tones she had ever heard him use. "I really can't have you waiting on me." He stood up and drew the side table to their own. "We can now help ourselves," he said with a return of his old manner, "without either being beholden to the other."

But there was a song in Mary's heart. She had caught a glimpse of the real man and for the first time since they had met he had called her "Miss Fulcher" and not "Madam."

Armitage did not unbend any further during breakfast, but Mary was content. Afterwards she went along to see her brother and stayed with him for a little while. When she got back she

found Armitage sitting in his cabin as though waiting for her.

"I thought you might like to see the prisoner," he explained, "and as I am going down, I waited for you."

"How nice of you !" she exclaimed.

"It is not nice," he retorted sharply. "It is merely a whim."

She laughed happily.

"What a grown-up child you can be," she said involuntarily, then bit her lip for fear of the storm, but it did not come.

"I suppose I do appear like that to some people," he observed almost sadly.

They went along to the hatchway together and he helped her to descend the gangway. Sir Fellowes Allen was sitting at the bottom picking at his tarry rope, with 'Curly' Summers lounging close by.

"Well, Allen," asked Armitage with a sneer, "are you finding your present life fascinating ?"

"Not exactly fascinating," replied the judge coolly, "but, apart from its unpleasantness, it is giving me the opportunity of studying the methods of a cur."

"You are daring, Sir Fellowes," snapped the other, his eyes narrowing wickedly.

"Not at all. There is nothing you could do to me which would make me alter my opinion. You have twice brought this young lady to see me now — I suppose it is your idea of refined torture."

"Why ?" demanded Armitage, taken by surprise.

"You know as well as I," said Sir Fellowes, "that to a man of my instincts you could not offer a greater indignity than to exhibit me, in my present condition, to a young woman of refinement and culture. If this lady had been a member of your gang, it would not have mattered, but it is easy to see that she could never harm a soul."

"I am glad I have found something to upset your infernal insouciance," growled Armitage. "No; this young lady is not a member of my gang, as you call it; she is merely staying on board here as the guest of her brother and myself."

"Which of your band of ruffians is her brother ?"

"My brother is Sydney Fulcher," declared Mary proudly, "and I object to your calling him a ruffian."

"H'm! So you're Fulcher's sister, are you?" murmured the judge, rubbing his chin. "No; perhaps he is not exactly a ruffian. All the same, young lady, I cannot congratulate you on either your brother or your friend."

"Friendship with Miss Fulcher," remarked Armitage drily, "is a distinction to which I am afraid I can neither lay claim nor ever attain. It will probably give you a great deal of pleasure to know that she looks upon me with even greater loathing and disgust than you do yourself — "

"That is untrue!" interrupted Mary hotly, but Armitage held up his hand.

"It has occurred to me," he went on, "that if you two are together you will be able to form yourselves into a mutual hate society. I am, therefore, going to ask Miss Fulcher to act as your guardian, Allen, while she is on the boat, and thus relieve my men for other and more important work. The only condition is that you will give your word of honour to make no attempt to escape or communicate with the shore."

Sir Fellowes looked at him curiously. There was the light of renewed hope in his eyes. During the time he had been a prisoner on the derelict, the judge had altered a great deal. He no longer had the air of a man twenty years his junior and his pale, effeminate face had become drawn and haggard, but he had gained something also: there was a more human touch in his expression, a softness in his eyes and at the corners of the thin lips that had not been there before.

"Of course I agree to your condition," he said. "There is little likelihood of my being able to escape; but what does Miss Fulcher say to such an arrangement?"

Armitage turned to her.

"All you need do," he remarked coldly, "is to sit down here for a certain number of hours morning and afternoon. I will have a chair brought down for you and any books you require. His meals will be taken to him as before. What do you say?"

"I should like to," she replied simply.

"Very well. . . You can go, Curly!" he added to the Cockney, who had been listening to the arrangement with an air of disapproval. "I shall want you to come ashore with me in half an hour."

Mary accompanied him back to the cabin in order to get her book. She lingered on the threshold of her own room and looked at him with a gentle expression in her eyes.

"Why have you done this?" she asked.

He was examining some papers in an attaché case and did not look up.

"Allen takes all the indignities and ordeals," he replied with asperity, "that I heap upon him, with hardly a murmur; in fact his whole attitude is not fear of me, but contempt for me. It is hardly worth while to torment a cold-blooded fellow like that. Besides his greatest trial is to come!"

"He is a gentleman, you see," she said quietly.

This time he glanced sharply at her.

"What has that to do with it?" he demanded.

"Noblesse oblige!" she murmured. "Hasn't it ever occurred to you that that also applies to you?"

The hard look was back in his face; his lips curled bitterly.

"Hasn't it ever occurred to you," he snarled, "that it would be wiser if you kept more of your thoughts to yourself?"

She disappeared hastily into her little cabin. Five minutes later she came out again, a book under her arm. He was still engaged in examining papers.

"May I speak?" she asked in a timid voice.

He looked at her with a frown.

"What is it?" he snapped. "I haven't noticed that you are particularly backward in speaking."

"You rather frighten me at times," she said solemnly. "I was going to ask you if you didn't think it rather unwise to go on shore in the daylight when you might be recognized."

"No fear at all," he replied confidently. "I challenge even your friend Leslie to penetrate my disguise. . . But what does it matter to you whether I take risks or not?"

"It matters to me a great deal," she murmured and stepped out on to the deck.

He watched her walk to the hatchway and descend the gangway until she had disappeared from view. Then he turned back to his documents with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SECOND VICTIM

Several days had passed by and Inspector Leslie was feeling disgruntled. There had been no clue to Armitage's whereabouts, and no attempt of any sort as yet made to abduct the remaining four whom he had threatened with retribution. In addition, Mary Fulcher's disappearance, and the clever way she had thrown her shadower off the scent, had upset the inspector. Inquiry had elicited the fact that she had crossed from one train to another at Weybridge, and Leslie felt rather inclined to blame himself for causing her to take such a risk. He had become very fond of Mary, and two fruitless calls which he had paid to her flat only left him feeling despondent. He knew of the visit which he suspected had been paid by her brother the night before she had disappeared, and he had little doubt that she knew where he was and had gone to him. Try as he and his colleague Morrison would, however, they were unable to pick up a single thread which would lead them to their quarry.

Shadlow had been followed everywhere and had gone back to Aylesbury the day before, but the constant surveillance had produced no result, and not one letter had been posted to him apparently. Leslie was unwilling, as yet, to declare himself and make an attempt to force Shadlow to tell what he knew. The latter would undoubtedly learn that the detective had called to see him at Aylesbury but, apart from causing him a certain amount of uneasiness, it would hardly make him think that he was being watched.

The papers were still full of the affair and the police had come in for a great deal of censure both in the House and in the pages of the daily press. Leslie had been spoken to with unusual sever-

ity by the Commissioner himself, and felt inclined to take it out of his subordinates whom he blamed for the fact that things had gone as badly as they had. Both he and Morrison had had little sleep since the abduction of Sir Fellowes Allen, and it was rather an irritable pair of inspectors, therefore, who sat in Leslie's room one afternoon four days after Mary's disappearance. They were going through the case laboriously, working back through every little detail to find a gleam of light, when the telephone bell rang.

"Another rumour!" said Leslie viciously. "Choke them off, Morrison!"

The stout man lifted off the receiver and, almost at once, his face changed colour.

"What?" he roared. "Say that again!"

He listened with a growing expression of horror, every now and again nodding as though taking in some important point. Leslie watched him, wondering what had happened, but did not ask a question until the receiver was back on its hook. Then Morrison dabbed his brow with a large silk handkerchief.

"Come on, Leslie!" he said. "We're up against it again."

"What's happened, man?" demanded his exasperated colleague.

"Smithers, the detective fellow, has been found murdered!"

"Good God!" ejaculated Leslie. "Where?"

"In his office in the Strand. Come on!"

"I wonder who's done it," mused Leslie as they rapidly made their way up Whitehall.

"No doubt about it," replied Morrison shortly. "Armitage!"

"Rot!" said the other. "He would never murder."

"Well, he has. There's a note, or something, there from him."

The rest of the way was traversed in grim silence. Smithers had rented a block of offices over an outfitter's establishment almost opposite the Savoy. He had been his own master for three or four years, and was reputed to make a good thing out of his unwholesome profession. Round the lower door they found a crowd being moved on by a policeman. Two or three reporters were already in evidence.

Running up the narrow staircase, Leslie quickly outdistanced his more unwieldy companion and found the detective who had

been told off to watch Smithers, waiting for him at the top. He was taken into a small bare office which boasted of a large desk, a filing cabinet, five chairs, and very little else in the way of furniture. A square of worn carpet lay before the desk, and on this was the body of the private detective stretched out dead. A doctor was kneeling by the side of the murdered man and Leslie waited until he had finished his examination. Morrison joined him breathing heavily. Presently the doctor rose.

"How was he killed ?" asked Leslie.

"Strangled !" replied the medical man shortly.

The inspector cast a look round the room.

"There is no sign of a struggle," he commented. "The murder must have been committed by an exceedingly powerful man."

"There was no struggle, sir," said the detective who had been on duty, "otherwise I would have heard it. I was sitting only a little way down the passage and, as you see, the partition isn't very thick between this office and the next."

"Who uses that ?" asked Morrison.

"Smithers' two assistants and a girl typist, sir. There's another small room farther on, generally used as a waiting-room for clients."

Leslie went on his knees by the side of the body. The face was not pleasant to see, and even a layman could have told that it was a case of strangulation. He looked up at the medical man.

"Wouldn't his heels have rattled on the floor, while he was being suffocated ?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "unless of course the assailant had his legs wrapped round them."

Leslie nodded and rose to his feet.

"Where's that note ?" he asked abruptly.

The detective handed it to him. It was a plain piece of thin paper, which might have been taken from Smithers' desk. On it had been written:

This is the second. The others will follow.
John Armitage

Leslie read it and passed it on to Morrison, who handed it back after perusal. Presently the doctor took his departure, and the

two inspectors viewed the rest of the suite of offices, and questioned the girl clerk and Smithers' two assistants. They had not heard any sound. A tall man with a grey beard, dressed in a brown suit with a grey felt hat pulled rather far over his eyes, had called about three. He had given his name as Webster and had been closetted with Smithers for over half an hour. About ten minutes after he had gone, the typist had taken some letters in to be signed and, to her horror, found Smithers lying dead on the floor. She had immediately informed the detective and the two other men. There was nothing else to be gained from questioning the three employees, and Leslie and Morrison went back to the front office.

"Well, what do you think of it ?" asked the former.

"Coolest thing I've known for a long time," was the reply. "In broad daylight, and with four people within hearing ! Gave the name of Webster too !"

"What has that to do with it ?"

"That was the name Armitage was supposed to use when he went off for jaunts with Mrs. Whitelaw."

Leslie whistled softly.

"So it was," he said. He went to the door and called in the detective.

"You saw the fellow who came up and presumably committed the crime," he said. "Did anything strike you as peculiar about him ?"

"No, sir. He looked like an elderly, well-to-do gentleman. I stared at him very searchingly, as I did at everyone who came up those stairs."

"His beard didn't appear to be false ?"

"No, sir. If I had suspected that I would have followed him into the office."

"Didn't it make you suspicious when you noticed him wearing his hat over his eyes ?"

"He wasn't when he passed me, sir. There is not much light in the corridor, so I suppose he didn't bother then."

"Did he appear agitated when he went out ?"

"Not a bit. He walked down as calmly as he had come up."

"Nobody else came up between the time of his going and the discovery of the murder ?"

"No, sir. And nobody went into Smithers' room from the other office until the girl entered and found the body. As you saw for yourself, there are no connecting doors between the three rooms. They all have to come out into the passage to get from one room to another, and I could see every movement from where I was sitting."

"Where did you find the note ?" asked Morrison.

"Lying folded up on the body, sir."

"H'm ! It looks bad for Armitage," commented Leslie. "I can't think why he should go to the extent of murder with this fellow, and kidnap Allen. Well, what do you want ?" he added sharply to a middle-aged man, wearing pince-nez and carrying an umbrella, who had knocked at the door, gazing round the while with inquisitive eyes.

"It's Martin of the *Daily Standard,"* observed Morrison before the newcomer could introduce himself.

"Then you take the newspaper men under your wing," said Leslie, "but for the love of Mike keep them out of here !"

Morrison grinned and left the room, taking the reporter with him. The detective remained with Leslie but was soon told to go outside, keep the door closed, and stand guard over it to prevent interruption. As soon as he was alone, Leslie knelt down again by the side of the body and lifted up both hands in turn. They were tightly clenched and he had some difficulty in opening them, but his efforts were well rewarded. The right hand contained nothing, but in the left was a button attached to a small piece of brown cloth. It was the type of button usually seen on the coat cuffs of a man's lounge suit, and it appeared as though the dying man, in a frantic effort to wrench the cruel grip from his throat, had caught the button between his fingers and torn it off. Leslie examined his find, then put it carefully into his pocket book, after which he searched the dead man's pockets. They were full of old letters, bills, a few betting slips, some silver coins, a penknife, and a note-case. Inside the case were half-a-dozen pound notes and a piece of tissue paper folded into four.

The inspector placed everything on the desk and proceeded to go through the letters. None of them were of the slightest importance, and certainly had no bearing on Smithers' murder. He had started to replace the articles in the dead man's pockets when he came across the slip of tissue paper which he had hitherto overlooked. He opened it out casually and saw that there was something written on it in pencil. It was not very legible and he was compelled to take it across to the window to obtain more light. The next moment he pursed up his lips in a low whistle and, folding the paper back into its creases, put it in his pocket book next to the button. That done he stood for some moments in deep thought, then stooping under the desk pulled out the wastepaper basket and emptied its contents on to the floor. With great care he examined the multifarious fragments of discarded letters, bills, memoranda, and records piled before him, every now and then putting aside a torn piece of paper until he was apparently satisfied. He replaced the bulk of the refuse in the basket and put the remainder in an envelope. This also was placed in his pocket. Morrison returned a minute or so later.

"Well," he said, "a pretty clear case, eh ?"

Leslie nodded.

"Looks like it," he replied.

"Where did you put Armitage's note ?"

"In my pocket book with two or three other useful exhibits which I will show you when we get back to the Yard."

He called in the officer who was still standing on duty at the door.

"You're in charge here," he announced, "until Williams and Scoby arrive from headquarters and the body is moved. The girl and the two men can go, but see that they take nothing away with them."

The detective nodded.

"What's the good of sending Williams and Scoby along ?" asked Morrison, as they walked down the stairs. "Do you think there is likely to be anything in the books worth finding ?"

"I am rather interested to know," observed Leslie, "whether

a certain private transaction of Smithers' is noted in the ordinary books of the firm."

"It is hardly likely, is it ?"

"Perhaps not."

Leslie dropped his colleague at Scotland Yard and drove down to Balham where Smithers had lived. He found the house without much difficulty. It was a small, two-storied affair with an attic, in an unpleasantly narrow street. Mrs. Smithers had died some years before and Smithers had been alone ever since, except for an occasional visitor. An untidy-looking woman opened the door to Leslie's knock and announced herself as the housekeeper. As considerately as he could, the inspector told her of the murder, and afterwards waited in the cramped hall while she shed a few maudlin tears. To his annoyance he was compelled to listen to a long panegyric extolling the rectitude and worth of the late lamented private detective but, with admirable tact, he disguised his feeling under an assumption of sympathy which, it is regrettable to have to record, he was not feeling.

Eventually he persuaded the housekeeper to let him search the dead man's belongings, but he found it necessary to use his authority before she would consent to take him to the room where the private papers were kept. Half an hour spent there was not productive of any fresh discovery, and there was nothing in any other room of any interest whatever. His investigations were not assisted by his companion's propensity to bury her face in his shoulder every few minutes and weep, and he was relieved when, at last, he stood outside the house.

Leslie found Morrison waiting for him in his room when he got back to Scotland Yard, and he immediately proceeded to show the stout man the button with its piece of torn cloth attached, the tissue paper, and the fragments which he had taken from the wastepaper basket in Smithers' office. Morrison whistled long and softly when he read the words written on the flimsy sheet.

"Now we know where we are," he said. "Great Scott ! What a find ! Old Chilsworth'll be tickled to death when he knows his bonny boys are at last getting down to brass tacks."

"Don't be so previous!" reproved Leslie. "We've a long way to go yet before we can get the darbies out. And please remember that this is my discovery not yours!"

"It would have been mine," retorted Morrison, "if I had stayed in that room and made the search instead of you."

Leslie said something of an uncomplimentary nature. He dispatched the torn fragments, which he had taken from the wastepaper basket, to another department to be pieced together and sent back, then went off to report to the gloomy Mr. Chilsworth, who received him very cuttingly, but parted from him almost cheerfully half an hour later.

Of course Smithers' death caused a greater sensation than ever, and there were some newspapers that threw off all restraint in their efforts to prove that a great criminal menace was hanging over London and that the ineptitude of the police would lead to the Metropolis becoming as dangerous for the law-abiding citizen, as certain cities on the other side of the Atlantic were reputed to be. There were no further questions asked in the House, but that was because the long vacation had commenced the day before. It was known, however, that Sir Stanley Long, the Home Secretary, was purposely remaining in London to watch developments. He and the abducted judge were friends of many years' standing, and it was rumoured that when the Commissioner of Police had called on him in response to his invitation, hard words had been spoken on both sides.

Leslie became busier than ever and, during the next two or three days, he hardly went to bed and took his meals when and how he could. Smithers' death had put a certain amount of useful information into his hands, but it did not lead him to Armitage, and London and the country for miles round were being combed exhaustively for the wanted man.

On the second evening after the murder, the inspector was on his way home in the hope of snatching a much needed rest. As he was passing Marble Arch, he saw a familiar figure, cigarette and all complete, leaning against the railings of the Park, apparently taking a reflective interest in the phantasmagoria of London life as displayed to him in that locality.

Leslie suddenly decided that it was time he attempted to get

a little information from Mr. Benjamin Shadlow and he drew into the pavement and came to a stop a little ahead of the meditating reporter. Close by was one of the plainclothes men whom he had detailed to watch Shadlow, and by an almost imperceptible movement he summoned him. The man passed slowly by without taking any notice of the inspector and, as he did so, the latter, with the same secrecy, informed him that he was conveying the reporter to Maida Vale. The detective walked on and Leslie stepped out of his car and strolled up to the live wire of *The Aylesbury Recorder,* who apparently had not perceived him.

"How do you do," he greeted him pleasantly. "I met you in the *Half Moon Hotel* some days ago, didn't I ?"

Benjamin at first failed to recognize him and was a little bit overcome at being accosted by such a resplendent person. Memory, however, asserted itself and he held out his hand.

"Glad to see you, sir," he said heartily. "Yes, the *Half Moon* was the place. I don't, as a rule, stay there — at least, I mean to say, it is not the place I would stay in ordinary circumstances, but it is convenient, you understand ?"

"Quite," nodded Leslie, wondering how anybody could find Mornington Crescent convenient. "Are you studying London life," he went on insinuatingly, "with a view to producing a few little cameos in your paper ?"

"I never touch photography," declared Benjamin grandly, "that is another department altogether."

"I see," said Leslie, without a smile. "Perhaps you are intending to write articles on life in the Capital ?"

"Not in my line. I'm news — morning, noon, and night — news all the time and everytime !"

"That sounds rather good," approved Leslie.

"Oh, it's nothing," remarked Benjamin. "One gets used to twisting phrases round one's tongue in my line."

"I suppose you do. Are you walking or have you a taxi waiting for you ?"

Mr. Shadlow looked surprised.

"At the moment," he asserted with pointed clearness, "I am standing still. If you mean — have I walked or ridden in a taxi to this spot, then I reply that I have walked."

"I see," said Leslie, feeling duly chastened. "You like walking I suppose ?"

"Not particularly, my dear sir. I have my own little car in the country, of course, but I consider riding in town a waste of money. I never spend a penny on it if I can help it. Plenty of people spend pounds, but I prefer — " The alliteration almost caused him to lose his cigarette end, but with a clever bit of lip jugglery — his lips were splendidly equipped for such contortions — he retained his hold. "I prefer," he went on, "to keep my money in my pocket. . . What about a drink ?"

"By Jove !" exclaimed Leslie, as though he had suddenly thought of a brilliant idea. "Why not come along to my flat in Maida Vale and dine with me ? I've nothing to do this evening, and I'll get my man to order dinner for two."

Mr. Benjamin Shadlow was deeply impressed. He had never been invited out to dinner before. He was of the class that takes its dinner in the middle of the day and calls the evening meal supper.

"We needn't bother to dress," went on Leslie enthusiastically. "We'll dine just as we are."

No doubt Benjamin felt relieved. His dress suit was reposing in a cupboard in Aylesbury intimately surrounded by moth balls. He smiled reminiscently: it had been a bargain, that suit — two pounds ten at a misfit shop !

"Great !" he exclaimed enthusiastically, then recollected that that was hardly the way to accept a dinner invitation. "I will have much pleasure," he added, "in dining with you."

"Good !" cried Leslie. "Come along !"

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. BENJAMIN SHADLOW DINES OUT

Mr. "Benny" Shadlow thoroughly approved of his companion's car, and said so in suitable terms. He lay back luxuriously in his seat and stretched his long legs to their farthest extent.

"Mine is not quite up to this class," he remarked magnanimously, as Leslie swung in and out of the traffic with unerring skill, "but she's a good little 'bus and I've done some remarkable itineries in her."

"I — what ?" asked the inspector.

"Itineries — Itineraries I mean !" Benjamin felt on safe ground. He had come across that word whilst studying his dictionary only a few hours before.

"I see," murmured Leslie.

They arrived at Maida Vale and the inspector established his guest in an easy chair in the drawing-room, while he went off to interview Hawkins.

"I want dinner for two, Hawkins," he said, "and forget for this evening that I'm a policeman."

"Didn't know you were, sir," replied Hawkins. "I halways had han hidea that you were han hinspector."

"Oh, Hawkins," groaned Leslie, "your aitches !"

"What's wrong with 'em, sir ?" asked Hawkins with a look of alarm.

"Drop them, man; drop them !"

"Er — certainly, sir. How do you suggest that I should do hit, sir ?"

"We'll talk it over some other time. I must return to my guest. He's a great newspaper man, Hawkins."

"His he, sir ?"

"Yes, and that is why I don't want you to say or do anything

that may lead him to suppose that I'm in the police force. Are there any of those awful headquarters groups about ?"

"No, sir. Hacting hunder your horders, sir, I confined 'em in the boxroom."

"Good ! Bring along some cocktails as soon as you've ordered dinner."

"Very good, sir."

Leslie rejoined his guest who was gazing round the room with the pleased air of a man who found himself in agreeable surroundings.

"Nice little place you've got here," he remarked conversationally.

"Not bad," said Leslie. "I find it a bit out of the way sometimes. It's a pretty long stroll to the West End and a car is apt to be rather a nuisance at times."

Benjamin looked at him curiously.

"What do you do for a living ?" he asked bluntly.

"Oh, mess about ! I occasionally do a little work."

"I see. You're one of them — those — people who are born providential, I suppose."

"Well, hardly providentially perhaps," returned Leslie modestly. "I might say I was born fortunate."

Benjamin looked worried.

"Er — yes, of course," he muttered, then brightened. "It was a bit of luck running into you tonight," he confided. "You know London pretty well, I take it ?"

"Very well, I think."

"Then perhaps you know some of the big fellows at Scotland Yard, do you ?"

"One or two," admitted Leslie.

"Well, I've come up here to gather news for my papers, and it occurred to me that the best way to get it would be to ask the police."

"But what have they to do with news ?" asked Leslie.

"They provide it," replied Benjamin brilliantly. "That's what I'm after, see — police news, especially about the Armitage case !"

"I thought you knew some of the inspectors at Scotland Yard," remarked Leslie.

"No, wish I did," said Mr. Shadlow regretfully. "Of course I know 'em all at Ayl — at my headquarters."

"But didn't you tell me," went on the unmerciful Dennis, "that you had had a talk, or a disputation or something, with Detective Inspector Leslie ?"

Benjamin's red face went redder; he pulled at his collar as though it were choking him, but he was not at a loss for long. A broad smile made his plain features look grotesque.

"Of course," he said. "I had forgotten. Fancy you remembering that ! My boy, you'll make a cognomen for yourself with that memory. I always did say that a man with a good intellect could get any job and rise to any heights. Why, there's nothing to stop him ! When I was a boy, everybody said — "

"So the best thing you can do," interrupted Leslie inexorably, "is to call on Inspector Leslie and ask him to tell you all about the Armitage case."

Benjamin came to earth with a bump.

"Yes," he agreed weakly. "I'll make a point of seeing him."

"Do !" advised Dennis.

"He's bound to tell me all there is to know."

"Oh, rather ! I'm sure he will."

Hawkins entered with the cocktails. His eyebrows rose until they almost disappeared in his sleek black hair when he saw the "great" newspaper man. He handed the "magnate" his glass with a look of disdain, and disappeared from the room. Benjamin looked at the amber coloured liquid and wondered if he would like it. He removed his cigarette-end from his lip and prepared to imbibe.

"I hope you drink cocktails," said Leslie politely.

So this was a cocktail, was it ? Mr. Shadlow had heard of such things, of course, but this was the first time —

"Rather !" he declared enthusiastically.

He took a sip and liked it, took another sip and liked it better. A moment later the glass was empty. Leslie called for more.

"To tell you the truth," observed Mr. "Benny" Shadlow, "I don't know what I'd do without my daily cocktails. There's no appetizer in the world like 'em."

Hawkins reappeared and, with rather an air of disapproval,

filled Benjamin's glass again. The latter nodded his head at the handyman with distinct approbation.

"You're the best cocktail shaker I've met for a long time, my man," he said as he once more drained the glass.

"My man" looked shocked.

"I ham no cocktail shaker, sir," he remarked, marching from the room with military dignity.

Benjamin laughed happily. This yellow stuff made one feel distinctly joyful.

"Your man has mistaken my meaning," he chuckled. "He is one of those old family servants we read about so much, I can see. Full of dignity and pom-pomposity."

The old family servant came back a little later and announced dinner, and Benjamin departed to have a sluice, as he called it.

The service of dinner proceeded very harmoniously but there was little conversation. Leslie supplied the bulk of it, Mr. Shadlow being too busy to do more than make an occasional remark and express loud approval of every dish that appeared upon the table. He felt it was only polite to show that he appreciated what was placed before him, and by Jove! he did, too. It was not every day that one was asked out to dinner like this. And as for liquid refreshment! Why there was sherry, some sort of white wine, which he was not too keen on, and champagne! Leslie had remarked that they would make this dinner an occasion and had told Hawkins to open a couple of bottles. And it was becoming an occasion indeed. Benjamin's face became broader and broader and Hawkins' longer and longer as the meal proceeded. The batman had taken a violent dislike to his master's guest, with the result that his pug nose looked, if anything, more puggy than ever, and his jaw had assumed the aggressiveness of a prizefighter's. When the coffee stage was reached and Mr. Shadlow had added a glass of port to the champagne, he was calling Leslie "old chap" and "old boy."

They retired to the drawing-room for coffee and liqueurs and, by that time, Leslie was convinced that his victim was ready for the slaughter. Benjamin drank his old brandy down at one gulp and immediately wished he had not. Hawkins got in some good punching practice and relieved his feelings, before the live

wire was sufficiently recovered to express his surprise that such a calamity should have befallen him.

"It happens to the best of us at times," remarked Leslie.

Benjamin looked at him with owlish eyes.

"You're quite ri', ole feller," he agreed; "quite ri'. D'you know," he went on, "I don't think I — I know your name, do I ?"

"I'll tell you before we part," promised Leslie. "By the way you were going to tell me all about Armitage and his affair, you know."

"Was I ? Jolly goo' feller, Armitage — one o' the best ! Six pound a week and thousand pound down at the end. Here's health to Armitage !"

He raised his empty glass and looked with disappointment at it. Leslie hastened to fill it again and warned him to drink it slowly. He was rewarded with a wink from his guest, who a second later startled himself with a tremendous hiccough.

"Sorry," he apologized; "mos' unfort'nate thing to do in gen'leman's house."

"That's all right," said Satan in the person of one Detective Inspector Leslie. "Take another sip !"

Benjamin took several more sips and showed signs of becoming sleepy, but Dennis had no intention of permitting anything of the sort.

"So you get six pounds a week from Armitage, do you ?" he asked. "That's very handsome of him. And you act as his go-between. Did you write the articles for the papers ?"

"No, sir," stuttered Benjamin, "he — he wrote 'em — I — I put 'em into shape. No more copy now — all fin — fin'shed. Sor — sorry he murdered Smith — Smith-ers. Stupid thing to — to do. 'P-'Pon my word, dunno how I — I'm goin' keep him out jail now. Ani-ani — " he stopped and took a deep breath. "Ani — animadvers-version," he went on, "is s'perfl'ous."

"Do you see him often ?" inquired Leslie casually.

"Now'n again, now'n again ! Only comes up the — the river when he's going do something."

"So he's down the river ?" murmured Leslie softly.

"No, no — not down river — dunno where he is, but not down river." He laughed uproariously. "He'd drown !" he spluttered.

"Of course I understand what you mean. He lives in the direction of the river."

"Dunno ! Only knows he lives tha' way." He waved his hand vaguely. "He has 'stablishment tha' way."

"You must like being connected with such a fine fellow."

Benjamin nodded solemnly.

"S'fine fellow !" he agreed. He detached the cigarette-end that was hanging from his lip and lit another, almost burning his long nose in the process. "S'fine fellow !" he repeated and went on, " 'Benj'min,' he said to me, 'keep me well in — informed activ'-ties police,' he said. 'If you hear 'nything take it ole mother Dunn'; an' I do !"

"Splendid !" approved Leslie. "She's a good sort, old Mother Dunn — I like her !"

"D'you know — know her ?"

"Of course !"

"Well, don't like her — too fond swearing. Curly's mother, y'know."

"Is she ? I didn't know that."

Mr. Shadlow nodded solemnly.

"I know," he said. "She told me. Married t-twice." He leaned forward impressively and almost fell out of his chair. "Husband left her *Ole Ship* — goo' feller — very goo' feller ! Superor'nary feller ! What about a lil drink ?"

"Certainly !" assented Leslie heartily. "What will you have ? A whisky and soda ?"

"Whisky'n soda'll do for me," muttered Benjamin.

The inspector crossed to a side table to mix the drink but when he turned again he found his guest fast asleep. He stood looking at him for a few minutes, then put down the glass and went back to his own chair. He sat there thinking deeply for over an hour, and still Benjamin slumbered on. Leslie had been more successful than he had anticipated. As far as he could tell from the disjointed remarks of Benjamin, the latter was supposed to communicate with Armitage through the medium of a woman called Dunn who kept a public house named the *Old Ship*. Unfortunately he had not found out where the *Old Ship* was, but as Benjamin had also made it clear that Armitage was living

somewhere down the river, the likelihood was that the public house was in the East End. He hoped to gain further information from the reporter when he awoke but, unluckily for his anticipations, Mr. Benjamin Shadlow was rather more sober than he had been before he dropped off to sleep. It was close on midnight when he eventually stirred and opened his eyes. He blinked owlishly at his host and shuddered when he caught sight of the glass of whisky.

"Feel sick," he muttered. "Been drinking, haven't I ?"

"Just a little," replied Leslie cheerfully. "Have a whisky and soda now. It will put you right !"

Benjamin spent some minutes in the throes of hiccoughs, but managed to intimate that he never wanted to taste any kind of wines or spirits again. When he had recovered from his spasm he looked suspiciously at Leslie.

"What have I been talking about ?" he demanded.

"Oh, various things — nothing of any importance."

Benjamin's eyes looked into those of the detective and he seemed reassured.

"Haven't been talking 'bout Limehouse, have I ?" he asked, punctuating his question with another loud hiccough.

"Not until now," replied Leslie, inwardly smiling at the way the reporter had given him the missing link.

"S'time I went home to bed," yawned Mr. Shadlow, utterly unconscious of his fatal lapse.

"I'll drive you there," said Leslie. "It would take you some time to get to Mornington Crescent at this time of the night."

"S'very good of you," muttered the reporter, whose head was beginning to feel as though it were imitating the movements of a concertina. He stood up and reeled. "M'fraid," he said seriously, "that — that I've — I've been more gripple than my wont."

"More what ?" asked Leslie.

"More gripple."

"Archaic, my son," protested the detective, "have another go !"

Hawkins appeared and handed Mr. Shadlow his hat, and there was that on the batman's face which indicated his relief in seeing the great newspaper man off the premises. He and Leslie between them helped the swaying man down the stairs and out to

the car, where they had a certain amount of difficulty in getting him into his seat. The fresh air seemed to aggravate his inebrious state, and he commenced to sing and beat time to his own raucous bawling. All the way to Mornington Crescent he kept up the din, and Leslie was relieved when the *Half Moon Hotel* was reached. He dragged rather than assisted his passenger to alight, and propelled him to the side entrance of the public house.

"Can you find your way to your room ?" he asked.

Benjamin nodded and was about to recommence his song, but the inspector put a firm hand over his mouth and told him to behave himself. It took him a long time to get any glimmerings of sense into the wine-clogged brain of his companion, but at last Mr. Shadlow gathered what he was talking about and promised to go to bed.

"Strikes me," he said with a leer, "I'm lil bit 'toshicated !"

Leslie opened the door which had apparently been left unlocked for him, and Benjamin promptly fell over the step. He showed signs of going to sleep where he lay, and it took the inspector another five minutes of strenuous endeavour to raise him from the floor. At last he had the satisfaction of seeing him well on his way up the stairs, and he gave a sigh of relief. He took the key from the keyhole and, closing the door, locked it from the outside, and dropped the key through the letter box, then returned to his car. He found a detective standing by waiting for him.

"I was outside your flat, sir," said the man, "and when I saw you drive off I followed in a taxi."

Leslie nodded.

"You can go off duty now," he remarked, "and pass the word along to the others. There will be no further need to watch this fellow."

He drove home and went to bed, feeling that an unpleasant evening had had its compensations. Early next morning he was at the Yard and got into telephonic communication with the inspector in charge of the Limehouse division.

"Have you a public house in your district called the *Old Ship ?"* he asked.

"We have," was the reply, "and if you want any information about it, I can give you reams."

"What sort of place is it ?"

"One of the toughest dives down here. It is close to the waterside in Chinatown and is kept by an old woman named Dunn. We've long suspected her of carrying on a profitable fencing business, but haven't had an excuse for searching her place yet. Why ? Have you got anything on her ?"

"I have reason to believe that she is acting as an intermediary between Armitage and a fellow who is sending him information from this end."

"That sounds interesting. She is 'Curly' Summers' mother, by the way, so it is very likely you're right. We've been watching the place in the hope of getting him."

"Yes, I heard of the relationship. Well, will you keep a strict look-out and hold any of the gang who might turn up ? I'll come down and see you in two or three days' time — I can't before, as I am going out of town today."

Leslie left certain instructions with his clerk, then returned to his flat and breakfasted. He was in the middle of his meal when Hawkins entered the room with a sniff and announced that the same person who had dined there the night before was waiting outside. Leslie frowned. What could Shadlow possibly want with him !"

"Show him in !" he ordered.

Benjamin came into the room as though he were in a hurry. He was a vastly different individual from the inebriated young man Leslie had seen home on the previous night, though he still showed traces of his potations on his coarse face. He looked dirty and unkempt, and his manner was excitable.

"Look here !" he said without any preliminaries. "I want to talk to you."

"I can give you ten minutes," announced Leslie, looking at the clock. "Sit down and have some breakfast !"

"I've had breakfast but I'll sit down."

"Do !"

Mr. Shadlow sat down. Leslie went on with his breakfast.

"I was drunk last night, wasn't I ?" inquired the former after a pause, during which he seemed to be groping in his mind for the necessary words to express himself.

"You were — very !"

"I thought so, and I've got a feeling that I talked a lot of stultiloquy."

"Good Lord !" ejaculated Leslie. "If you mean you talked a lot of rot," he went on, "I am prepared to agree with you."

"What did I say ?"

"Why worry ? Are you afraid that you gave something away ?"

"What did I say ?" repeated Benjamin doggedly.

"You really want to know ?"

"Yes."

"Well, your mind seemed to be concentrated on Armitage and his wicked ways. In fact it was such an obsession with you that you actually imagined you were helping him in some manner."

Shadlow's face had gone a pasty white and a look of fear made his watery, red-rimmed eyes positively ghastly. His agitation was so great that he had thrown away one cigarette-end and forgotten to light another.

"How was I supposed to be helping him ?" he asked hoarsely.

"You said you were collecting information about the activities of the police and sending it to him through an old woman called Dunn, who keeps the *Old Ship* in Limehouse."

Benjamin gave a shudder and hid his face in his hands.

"What a fool I am !" He groaned several times before he looked up again, then caught Leslie eagerly, almost feverishly, by the arm.

"Look here," he said. "It's all rubbish of course, but it might cause — cause trouble if you told — You'll keep mum, won't you ? Promise me !"

"Is it true that Armitage is paying you six pounds a week ?"

"My God !" exclaimed the unhappy Benjamin. "Did I say that, too ?"

"You did, my son," replied Leslie with a nod. "You also gave

me to understand that Armitage was hiding somewhere down the river."

There was a long pause. Shadlow was obviously making a big effort to pull himself together. Presently he forced a laugh and lit a cigarette, but the hand that held the match was trembling violently.

"What an imagination I've got!" he said with assumed jocularity. "I shall have to take more care of my tongue in future. But you'll keep quiet, won't you?" he added.

"Why should I?" asked Leslie quietly.

Benjamin stared at him.

"Because it might put the police—" He pulled himself up sharply.

"You were going to say it might put the police on the track," observed the inspector.

"Not a bit of it. I was going to say that it might—might cause no end of a bother with the police."

"Not bad," commented Leslie, who was enjoying himself. He looked at the clock again. "I'm sorry to rush you off," he said, "but I am going away on a journey and I have no further time to waste."

"Promise me to keep quiet then!" insisted Benjamin.

"I'm sorry, I can't!"

Mr. Shadlow stared at him in horror.

"You—mean—you—won't?"

"Put it that way if you like!"

Then Mr. "Benny" Shadlow lost his head. He jumped to his feet and his ugly face became distorted with rage.

"I believe you made me drunk on purpose," he almost screamed. "I believe you did; and then tried to make me talk. You're a damned spy, that's what you are. I don't care—it's not true anyway. I'll—I'll swear it's not!"

"I shouldn't do that if I were you," said Leslie quietly.

Benjamin calmed down somewhat.

"No, you wouldn't," he sneered; "you sanctimonious, double-faced, dissembling hypocrite! Who the devil are you?"

Leslie handed him a card. Benjamin gave it one look and

collapsed into his chair. The inspector left him there and went off to his bedroom. Presently he reappeared dressed for the street, followed by Hawkins carrying his bag. Mr. Shadlow still sat where he had fallen, his face ghastly, his features working spasmodically.

"Take my advice," said Leslie; "go back to your paper at Aylesbury and stop there! You are lucky to get out of this business with nothing worse than a shock. You know now probably why I called to see you at the office of *The Aylesbury Recorder,* and also why I was in the saloon bar of the *Half Moon* when you came in and announced that you had been having what you called a disputation with me!"

Benjamin shuddered violently and moaned.

"If," warned Leslie, "you make any further attempt to get into touch with Armitage, you will be arrested and made to stand your trial with the others. Now get out!"

Mr. Shadlow rose weakly to his feet and shuffled to the door, from where he looked back at Leslie.

"This has been a nasty jar for me. I'll never drink again," he muttered and slowly made his way out.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MARBLE STATUE

It was three days before Leslie returned from his mysterious trip, and he went straight to New Scotland Yard. He found Morrison awaiting him with a very gloomy face and a general air of perturbation.

"So you're back!" he said unnecessarily. "You've heard the news, of course?"

"Heard the news!" repeated Leslie in tones of disgust. "Who could help hearing it?"

"Have you seen the papers?"

"I wish you wouldn't keep asking fool questions," snapped Dennis irritably. "Everywhere one goes, bundles of newspapers are pushed into one's face by excited newsvendors. Placards proclaim the startling fact to the sky and call down vengeance on the incompetent police. I'm sick, sad, and sorry of newspapers and their comments."

He threw himself into a chair and lit a cigarette.

"Chilsworth is like a bear with a sore head," said Morrison. "Everytime I go to his office I find him walking up and down, looking as black as thunder. He's dying to see you!"

"Let him die!" muttered Leslie unfeelingly.

"He asked me to tell you to go to him as soon as you arrived."

"Did he? Well, he can wait! I'm tired."

At that moment the object of their remarks flung into the room. He certainly did not look as though life had agreed with him any too well lately. He had the appearance of a man who had had several sleepless nights, and his dark face was even more Semitic-looking than usual. He ignored Leslie's respectful greeting.

"I heard you were back," he barked. "I wanted to see you as soon as you arrived. Didn't you tell him ?" he asked, turning to Morrison.

Before his colleague could reply, Leslie answered for him.

"Morrison informed me that you wished to speak to me," he said, "but I have only been here about five minutes. I would have come along in due course."

"Due course !" shouted Chilsworth. "Don't you realize that when I give an order I expect to be obeyed ?"

Leslie bent his head deferentially.

"I wanted to get the facts before I saw you, sir."

"Facts ! Facts !" cried the irascible assistant commissioner. "I suppose you've read the papers, haven't you ?"

"I have, but papers are hardly official organs and they seem to be particularly hysterical lately."

"You know what has happened and that is all that matters. It seems to me that you and Morrison between you are making a hopeless mess of this case."

He stuck his hands behind his back and paced the room excitably.

"What you wanted to go on a hairbrained picnic for," he resumed savagely, "when all these things were happening in London, God only knows ! I used to think a lot of you, Leslie; your work has been exceptional, but lately you've disappointed me woefully — woefully !"

The inspector rose to his feet.

"You shall have my resignation in your office in half an hour, sir," he announced stiffly.

"Don't be a fool, man !"

"I may be many things, sir," was the firm reply, "but I am not a fool. This case has been an exceptionally difficult one right from the start. You and others refused to take Armitage seriously at first, with the result that I was handicapped from the very beginning against a man who has not only almost unlimited resources at his command, but who has also proved himself very clever as a criminal. And now I am further handicapped by the old, old story of too many cooks. I told you the other day that I would bring the case to a conclusion in less than a

fortnight and, because Armitage has scored another point, Scotland Yard goes into the air with an attack of hysterics. Under these conditions I prefer to tender my resignation."

Chilsworth had stopped his perambulations while Leslie was speaking. He now walked up to the table, pulled out a chair, and sat down.

"It is not a matter of our getting excited," he stated in a calmer voice than he had hitherto used. "Look at the fuss the papers are making; and the Home Secretary is taking the most embarrassing personal interest in the case, with the result that hardly an hour goes by without an inquiry from him."

"I wish he'd mind his own business," growled Leslie.

Chilsworth looked at him with a wintry smile.

"Would you care to repeat that remark to him ?" he asked.

"I have no objection, sir; I'd put it more politely perhaps."

"You'll have your chance to-morrow evening. He has called a conference at his house in Grosvenor square !"

"That also I read about," observed Leslie drily, "in the columns of the ubiquitous press, but what has the conference to do with me ?"

"You are requested to be present with the Commissioner and myself."

"Oh, hang it all !" exclaimed Leslie; "I've no time for frivolities of that sort. Why does he want me ?"

"I'm afraid I cannot tell you. . . What do you propose to do about this third outrage ?"

"Before discussing that, sir," said Leslie firmly, but respectfully, "I should like to have my position clearly defined. Am I in charge of this case, or am I not ? If I am, then I want an undertaking from you that I get *carte blanche;* if not, then as I have just intimated, my resignation goes in."

Chilsworth gazed at him for a moment with a frown, then:

"As far as I am concerned," he declared, "you get *carte blanche.*"

Leslie resumed his seat.

"Coming from you, sir," he smiled, "that is quite good enough for me. I am not interested in gentlemen who will insist on interfering in affairs of which they have no knowledge. I consider that the Home Secretary is grossly exceeding his powers."

"S'sh !" murmured Chilsworth. "I may agree with you, Leslie, but I hope I have more discretion than to say so."

Dennis laughed and regained all his good humour.

"What time is this conference to-morrow, sir ?" he asked.

"Ten o'clock !" replied the assistant commissioner.

"Just the time," grumbled the inspector, "when I want to be down in the East End. However, it can't be helped. Now, Morrison, will you be good enough to tell me all about this fresh disaster from the police point of view ?"

Morrison deposited his bulky form on an available chair, and stroked his huge moustache.

"It was about midnight the night before last," he began, "when I first heard about it. It appears that Mrs. Pennington had come home from a dinner party and had announced her intention of taking a bath and going straight to bed. Her maid went to prepare the bath and, when it was ready, returned to inform her mistress. To her surprise she could not find her and, in spite of a thorough search both by herself and the other servants, failed to discover the slightest trace of her."

"She has not been seen since ?"

"No."

"What time was it when she disappeared ?"

"Just after eleven."

"And nothing suspicious was noticed by our men ?"

"Nothing at all. One, as you know, was posted in the garden, and it would have been impossible for anybody to have either come in or gone out without his seeing them; the other man was in the road."

"What time did you get up to the house ?"

"About a quarter to one. I had to cross right over London to get there."

"And you found no clue I suppose ?"

"Not a thing !"

Leslie sat leaning on his elbow and gently brushing back his hair — a habit of his when in deep thought.

"It's curious," he said, after a while, "that not a soul can give us the slightest hint."

"Armitage is a devil !" muttered the assistant commissioner.

"Was there any note left ?" asked Leslie.

"No," replied Morrison. "I suppose he hadn't time."

"Could she have been taken out through the back way and over the garden wall ? I noticed there was a high wall running practically round the house."

"Impossible !" said Morrison decisively. "At the time that she was preparing for her bath, four of the servants were in the domestic offices and the kidnappers would have had to pass right through them to reach the back door. They couldn't have done it; besides there is a gravel drive round the house and Shelton was patrolling up and down — he would have heard the sound of footsteps."

"What is on the other side of the wall at the back ?"

"The Heath !"

Leslie whistled softly and smiled pleasantly at the assistant commissioner.

"Quite a little problem," he remarked. "I'm glad you have given me *carte blanche,* sir," he added cryptically.

"What do you mean ?" demanded Chilsworth.

"If you're a betting man, sir, I don't mind — No, perhaps, not," he added rather lamely.

"I wish you wouldn't always be so damnably mysterious, Leslie," said the commissioner irritably.

"Mystery be to him who mystery thinks," observed Dennis with outrageous plagiarism. He rose to his feet. "I'm going to take a little trip up to Hampstead, sir," he announced. "I'd like to look round the scene of the abduction myself."

Chilsworth got up and sauntered to the door.

"I hope you'll find something to go on," he remarked, "but I don't think that matters much. The thing to do is to run Armitage to earth !"

"I've been having a few meditations," observed Leslie, "while I have been away; in other words, I have been putting two and two together and making twenty-two to my own satisfaction. I'm not so sure that we'll be required to run Armitage *to earth.*"

"The love for conundrums," declared the assistant commissioner, "will be your downfall."

He went out and Leslie laughed.

"The trouble with Chilsworth," he said, "is that he hasn't a sense of humour."

Morrison grinned.

"It's wonderful how you keep him in his place," he remarked. "He came in like a lamb and went out like a — like a ravening wolf."

Leslie shook his head sadly.

"My dear old chap," he murmured reprovingly, "aren't you getting a bit mixed ?"

"Oh ! I mean the other way round !"

"Good Gracious ! I wouldn't have believed it !"

Morrison looked belligerent and Leslie pushed him back in his chair.

"Sit there," he ordered, "until your ferocity has abated."

"I say, Leslie," asked Morrison, "what did you mean by that remark of yours about being glad you had been given — well, you know; never could get hold of those French phrases ! Have you something in the back of your mind ?"

"Lots !" replied Leslie vaguely.

"Tell me what you're thinking about !"

"Will you tell me one thing first ? It has always puzzled me and on occasions has caused me sleepless nights."

Morrison looked at him suspiciously.

"What is it ?" he asked.

"Why did they ever make you an inspector ?"

He was out of the room before the slow-working brain of Morrison had devised a sufficiently cutting answer.

Hawkins had met his master at the station with the car and as Leslie had driven direct to Scotland Yard he had perforce to accompany him. When Dennis emerged after his consultation with the assistant commissioner and Morrison, he found his handyman sitting stolidly in the car, with a look of patient resignation on his face. Hawkins did not approve of Scotland Yard.

"Hullo, Hawkins !" exclaimed his employer. "I forgot all about you. Why didn't you go home and leave the 'bus here ?"

"You never said nothing to me, sir, about going home," replied Hawkins, "so I stopped."

"Splendid fellow! Well, we'll go home now. I want a bath and a change, and I could do with something to eat."

"You shall have plenty to heat, sir," said Hawkins generously. "There's lots of heggs and bacon, a cold steak and kidney pie, hor you can have a homlette—"

"Don't, Hawkins!" pleaded Leslie, as he turned the car into Whitehall. "You are making my mouth water."

"Hall the same," muttered the handyman to himself, "what habout my morning's work, I should like to know. I hoped to get hout a bit to-day with the daughter of the greengrocer; she's a gal that a man could be proud to walk hout and habout with, but—"

A sudden swerve brought him to the realization that his master was driving. Nobody could have pleasant, and certainly not amorous, meditations in a car which was being driven by Detective Inspector Leslie.

Back in the flat after an absence of three strenuous days, the young detective enjoyed every second of his bath and every mouthful of his belated breakfast. Leslie had the knack of centring his mind entirely on whatever he was doing at the moment with the fullest enjoyment, to the exclusion of everything else. He was waited upon with great care by Hawkins who seemed delighted to have him back in the flat again.

After he had done justice to an excellent repast he once more entered his car, looking as spruce as a new pin, and drove to Mrs. Pennington's house in Hampstead. He was admitted by the same girl who had opened the door to him on his previous visit. He asked to see the butler and the maid who had prepared the bath for her mistress on the night she had disappeared so mysteriously. He was shown into the drawing-room, and spent the time while waiting, in examining the marble statue. It seemed to have a peculiar fascination for him. Several times he walked round it and bent down to inspect the thick and solid-looking plinth. He was thus engaged when the butler entered the room followed by Mrs. Pennington's maid.

For a long time he questioned them but they were unable to tell him anything that he did not already know. He was taken

up to the bedroom and found it to be a large airy apartment with three doors; one leading to the bathroom, one opening onto the corridor that ended in the main staircase, and the other shutting off a passage that communicated with the stairs used by the servants. Leslie walked through the last and made his way down to the domestic part of the establishment. The staircase came to an abrupt stop opposite to the pantry, with the kitchens on the right, a scullery a little farther on, on the left, and a passage leading straight on past the pantry to the servants' dining-room. Directly to his left was the back door. He opened it and strolled up the three steps into the open. Facing him was a garage, behind which was a vegetable garden, and farther back still the high brick wall separating the premises from Hampstead Heath.

"You have no door in that wall, have you ?" he asked the butler who had followed him out into the garden.

"No, sir," replied the man. "Madam always considered it a great nuisance to be compelled to walk around whenever she wished to go on to the Heath, and I believe she intended having a door constructed."

Leslie walked along by the wall examining it carefully, and presently came to an old gnarled oak tree which grew flush with it. He studied this for some minutes.

"It would be easy enough," he observed, "for anybody to climb to the top by means of that tree."

He suited the action to the word and, with the greatest ease, scaled the oak and sat himself astride the wall. There was a drop of about nine feet down to the grass on the other side, and not far off was a pathway. It would have been possible to have brought a car to within a few yards. He returned to the butler.

"That is the way your mistress was taken," he said. "A ladder placed against the wall on the other side would have made the matter as simple as A.B.C."

"But, sir," protested the butler, "they could never have got her out of the house down the back stairs. There were too many of us about. And as for the front door the gentleman in plain-clothes was watching that."

"My dear good man," said Leslie, "she is not in the house, is she ?"

"No, sir."

"Then she must have gone out either by the front or back door. The day of miracles is past, otherwise we might have suspected that she was spirited away through the roof. I am inclined to think that she would have been seen had she been taken out the front, but not necessarily the other way. There may have been several of you about, but you must remember that none of you were expecting to see her being brought down those back stairs, and that makes all the difference."

The butler shrugged his shoulders politely but he was obviously not convinced.

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Leslie irritably; "are you trying to suggest to me that this house, a modern building, contains a secret passage known only to the people who kidnapped Mrs. Pennington?"

The butler's eyes opened wide.

"I never thought of that, sir," he said excitedly. "Perhaps that is the solution."

Leslie was about to make a caustic remark, but an idea suddenly occurred to him. For some time he had been casting about in his mind for an excuse to get into the drawing-room and stay there alone for a little while. Here was one ready-made.

"Of course we can't afford to overlook even the most unlikely theories," he remarked, "so we'll see if we can find a secret passage."

They went back to Mrs. Pennington's bedroom together and the inspector started to tap the walls. After five minutes he stopped and looked at the butler.

"I'll be all day over this," he observed, "if I do it alone. It is my experience that secret passages are usually built on the ground floor. If they are made upstairs, it means the construction of steps in the wall. How many rooms are there downstairs, apart from the kitchen and other domestic apartments?"

"There is the dining-room, drawing-room, morning-room, library, a little writing-room, and a billiards-room, sir."

"That is six in all. Well, look here, you take the dining-room and morning-room; I'll examine the walls of the drawing-room and the others. If the wall sounds hollow to you anywhere mark

the spot and, when I join you, we'll examine it together. Lock yourself in and then you can't be disturbed !"

"Very well, sir."

Full of excitement and importance, the butler accompanied Leslie down the stairs and went off to the dining-room. The inspector waited until he heard him close and lock the door then, with a smile, he walked on to the drawing-room and shut himself in. He sat on a chair facing the marble statue and taking out his pipe filled and lit it.

"I wonder if the lady objects to smoking in her drawing-room," he murmured.

He gave himself up to meditation and sat for some time with his hands behind his head puffing placidly at his briar, then he rose and went over to the statue. He committed the iniquity of standing on one of the Chippendale chairs in order to reach the head of the image and commenced to feel every inch of it with his fingers. He worked all the way down, taking care not to miss any of it, and putting particular pressure on parts of the marble which were protuberant. It took him an hour almost before he reached the plinth, then he sat down and had a rest.

"I wonder what I expected to find," he mused. "Ah, well, I've struck a snag this time. For once in a way my instinct has let me down. Still, might as well finish the job !"

He knelt down and continued his careful examination of the base of the magnificent piece of sculptery, and almost at once something happened. Round the feet of the image several flowers had been carved, and he had put his thumb hard on the centre of one of these. There was a whirring sound followed by a click, and he sat back on his heels and gazed up at the towering figure above him. There appeared to be no alteration of any sort.

"Something took place, but what ?" he muttered.

Again he pressed his thumb on the flower but kept it there this time. The sound recommenced, and presently a part of the plinth at the back of the statue began to move slowly outwards like a drawer. He watched it fascinated, until it stopped with a sharp snap. At once he was looking into the receptacle and, with a low whistle, he drew out a bundle of letters tied with ribbon and a curious-looking article which he held in his hand for some time

before replacing. The top letter of the package he extracted from the ribbon and opened. The ink had faded but the writing was perfectly distinct, and after reading a few words, Leslie put it back with the others and placed the bundle in his pocket. He then pressed once more on the flower and the drawer slowly slid back into place to stop in position with a click. He made a careful examination of the pedestal but so cleverly had the secret receptacle been made to fit that there was not the slightest trace of a join.

He rose to his feet with the satisfied air of a man whose theories had been put to a very successful test then, crossing the room, he unlocked the door and found his way to Mrs. Pennington's writing-room.

CHAPTER XXV

AN INTERLUDE AT THE RITZ

For half an hour he worked silently and methodically in the little room, opening drawers and examining their contents with an utter disregard for their owner. Several of the drawers were locked but that made no difference to him, for he possessed a little bunch of instruments that made light of even the most obstinate lock. However, his investigation was not very profitable and eventually he gave it up.

"I ought to be thoroughly ashamed of myself," he murmured, "but I am not !"

He walked along the hall and located the butler in the morning-room. He knocked and was admitted.

"Any luck ?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not, sir," replied the man with regret; "there's just a chance that there is an opening by the mantelpiece in the dining-room."

He conducted the detective to the place in question, and solemnly tapped on the wall with his knuckles. Leslie listened with serious face, then tried it himself.

"No," he declared with decision; "there is no sign of any secret opening there. I'm afraid we'll have to give it up for the present, at least I will. I shall be obliged if you will continue your investigations and let me know if you have any success when I call again."

"Certainly, sir." The butler would ever afterwards have a story to relate of the time when he had helped the police.

Leslie walked out to his car and chuckled as he sat himself at the wheel.

"I think I'll write a book," he murmured, "and call it, 'How to keep butlers busy when their mistresses have been kidnapped' !"

His movements for the next half hour or so were rather curious in a man who was in search of an abducted lady. He drove to Wimpole Street and stopped at the door of the house in which Dr. Whitelaw had once lived. He was admitted, after he had presented his credentials, by an interested housekeeper who took him to the room which had witnessed the fatal accident. It was now a consulting-room, the present occupant of the house being unmarried and preferring his private apartments on an upper story. Leslie noted the position of the alcove and, imagining the presence of the statue, measured with his eye the distance it must have stood from the fireplace, and stepped across and back. His weird manœuvres were watched with surprise by the mystified housekeeper and by a manservant who stood looking in the door behind her, but he gave them no explanation of his behaviour. After a further glance round the apartment he thanked the woman for her courtesy and took his leave.

He arrived back at Scotland Yard and found that Morrison was out interviewing a man who, answering to the description of Steve Hardy, had been arrested in Stoke Newington. He waited impatiently for the return of his colleague but it was nearly two before that burly man came in looking very warm.

"Phew !" he exclaimed. "It's hot !"

"Any luck ?" asked Leslie.

"Luck be blowed !" muttered Morrison, strenuously wiping his face with a handkerchief. "He was no more Steve Hardy than I am. There was a certain amount of resemblance but that's all. These fellows ought to know better than to fetch a man of my build out on a wild goose chase in the middle of a heat wave. What have you been doing ?"

"Wasting my time outrageously," replied Leslie cheerfully. "I've had a most enjoyable morning as a matter of fact, playing a kind of indoor game with the family butler."

Morrison snorted.

"That means to say," he accused, "that you have something up your sleeve. Come across !"

"No, my lad; at least not yet. Morrison," he went on, "you are about to be the recipient of a great honour. I am going to take you out to lunch."

The burly detective whistled.

"Have you come into a fortune ?" he asked.

"Very nearly. Come along !"

Leslie drove to the Ritz and led his companion through to the lounge. A waiter came hurrying up, and he ordered two cocktails.

"What is the big idea ?" queried Morrison, as he followed his companion's example and sank into a chair.

"The big idea is luncheon, my boy," replied Dennis.

"But why here ? If this is an attempt at atonement for the many injuries you have done me, I should have felt more like forgiving you in the Piccadilly Corner House. This place makes my suit feel uncut, my boots like clogs, and my hands like lumps of raw meat."

Leslie laughed.

"Why be so personal to yourself ?" he asked. "As a matter of fact you fit in as though you were to the manner born."

"If I thought you had brought me here to take a rise out of me," began Morrison darkly, "I'd — "

"Peace, my son ! Here come the cocktails !"

The burly detective's hand engulfed his glass like a huge wave swamping a rowboat. He became more comfortable after he had drunk the seductive liquid, however, and walked along to the restaurant in the wake of his colleague with less apprehension and with a growing appreciation of his surroundings. An attentive maître d'hôtel found them a corner table from where they had a good view of the room; and Morrison almost forgot to eat, he became so interested in watching the various dainty women in smart toilettes accompanied by their attendant cavaliers.

"A place like this," remarked Leslie, "is very interesting to students of human nature like you and me. Look at that tall woman over there for instance."

"What about her ?" asked Morrison.

"Who would you think she is ?"

"A duchess or something of that sort," hazarded the stout detective.

Leslie laughed.

"Not a bit of it," he said. "Her name is Mrs. Wilbur Cum-

mings; she's the wife of a millionaire mill-owner, and the sister of Mrs. Pennington !"

"My hat !" ejaculated Morrison. "She doesn't seem to be much upset by the disappearance of her sister, does she ?"

"I don't think she minds very much. As far as I can make out they never got on very well together. I'm going to try and get a word with her presently."

"So that's why you brought me here ?"

"Partially !"

Morrison made a sound expressive of deep disgust.

"And I thought you had suddenly become generous," he observed.

"You must admit," said Leslie, "that I need not have brought you."

Morrison weighed up this statement with becoming gravity.

"There's something in that," he acknowledged at last.

The service of luncheon proceeded and Morrison, at least, was thoroughly enjoying himself. Leslie appeared to be more engaged in watching the entrance to the restaurant than in appreciating the dishes that were set before him. At last he gave vent to an exclamation of pleasure, and watched the entry of a very small man with pure white hair and a face that looked like parchment which had become wrinkled by exposure to the sun. Morrison heard his ejaculation, and looked across the room.

"Hullo !" he exclaimed. "There's old Walton. I thought he lived in the country now and never came up to town."

"He comes up every Thursday," remarked Leslie, "and invariably lunches here at two or thereabouts. To-day he is very late."

"You seem to know a lot about him," muttered Morrison.

"I know a lot about everybody worth knowing," returned Dennis modestly. "The principal reason I came here to-day was to try to get a word or two with Sir Austin. If you'll excuse me for a few minutes, I'll go across to him now."

"Go ahead !" responded the burly inspector with a wave of his hand. "I can't understand, though, what you want to talk to him about."

Leslie did not stop to explain, but followed in the wake of the little group advancing to a vacant table. An obsequious maître

d'hôtel led the way, followed by the famous advocate, who in turn was followed by a waiter. Apparently Sir Austin was regarded as a valuable patron. Leslie waited until he was seated, then strode forward. The retired barrister looked up from the menu and fixed his small, beady eyes on the detective.

"Leslie!" he grunted. "Glad to see you! What do you want?"

Without waiting for a reply he turned and gave an order to the maître d'hôtel, who immediately hurried away with the waiter, then looked back inquiringly at the detective.

"I won't take up much of your time, sir," said Leslie, "but I know you have always felt a particular concern in the Armitage case."

A gleam of interest came into Sir Austin's sharp eyes. He nodded.

"Quite right!" he admitted. "Young fool seems to have gone mad now, though. Abduction and murder! Pshaw! I would never have believed it. But what do you want to talk to me about him for?"

"I want to tell you something," replied Leslie, "and ask you a few questions, if you don't mind. You were in a better position to notice certain peculiarities of the Armitage trial than probably anybody else."

"Sit down! Sit down!" said Sir Austin impatiently.

For nearly ten minutes the two sat leaning across the table towards each other talking eagerly. The maître d'hôtel made two efforts to approach but each time was waved back irritably by the barrister. At last Leslie rose with a smile on his lips.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said, "that certainly clears the situation. I am sorry to have delayed your lunch."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Sir Austin, holding out his hand, which the detective grasped warmly. "Don't forget to send me a wire! I want to be there."

"I shan't forget," promised Dennis, and made his way back to his own table.

Morrison greeted him with a frown.

"You've missed half the lunch," he observed. "I'll have to wait for you to catch me up."

"I want nothing more," replied Leslie. "Let us go and have coffee in the lounge. I should like to catch Mrs. Wilbur Cummings as she comes out."

"Do you know her to speak to?"

"No, but she is with a friend of mine."

They made their way to the lounge where coffee was brought to them.

"What were you talking to old Walton about?" queried Morrison, selecting an enormous cigar from a box presented to him by a waiter.

"Our subject," replied Leslie blandly, "was: should pigeons be plucked or preserved!"

"Shucks!" ejaculated his companion with profound disgust. "By the way!" he added suddenly a moment later. "Did I tell you that Humphreys is getting windy?"

"What about?" asked Leslie, with apparent unconcern.

"Last night, Robins told me he was on duty outside the house, when he noticed some men creeping along by the railings. He challenged them and they made a concerted rush at him, but he blew his whistle and they immediately cleared off. They just managed to get away in a car before three of our men, who had orders to keep within hail, came up."

Leslie was interested now.

"When did you hear this?"

"Just after you left this morning. Had no time to tell you sooner. Well, of course, Sir Phillip heard about it and apparently the constant expectation that something is going to happen is getting on his nerves. He rang up and implored us to do something — in fact he was distinctly rude."

"I'll go and see him this afternoon," promised Leslie, "and try to calm him down."

He watched the approach of a little group of people led by a tall, stately lady. She gave one the impression that she was in the habit of having her own way in all things. About forty years of age she looked younger, and there was a striking resemblance to her sister, although Mrs. Wilbur Cummings had none of the beauty of Patricia Pennington. But she was more dignified; had more poise. She was beautifully dressed in a gown that

spoke of Paris and a single pearl, that must have been worth thousands, hung from a platinum chain round her neck. Following her was a little group of men, one of whom was a stockbroker in the City whom Leslie knew intimately. The latter detached himself from his companions and came across with outstretched hand.

"Where have you been hiding yourself lately?" he asked. "Have you entirely cut out clubs and frivolities of all sorts?"

"My dear chap," explained Leslie, "I have been working! I am not one of the leisured city men who call themselves stockbrokers and take lovely ladies out to lunch. You don't know Morrison, do you? Inspector Morrison — Mr. Clifford!"

The two shook hands.

"Of course," conceded Clifford, "I had forgotten that you must be kept pretty busy these days. That fellow Armitage is leading you a bit of a dance, isn't he?" He smiled reflectively. "Some of the papers," he resumed, "are bent on giving you fellows a bad time."

Morrison growled something below his breath.

"Everybody must live," observed Leslie. "If, through us, the newspapers can manage to enhance their sales, all the better. Very often we make capital out of them."

"You always were by way of being a philosopher, Dennis," commented the stockbroker.

"There is nothing philosophical about me at the moment. I want you to introduce me to Mrs. Wilbur Cummings."

"Come along then."

Morrison remained behind while the other two strolled across to where Mrs. Wilbur Cummings held her small court in a conspicuous part of the lounge. Clifford presented his companion, and she received the inspector graciously, making room for him to sit by her side. They spoke of the topics of the hour for a few minutes — Lords, Goodwood, the Russian situation — then, leaning slightly towards her, Leslie announced in a low voice that he would like to have a few words with her about her sister. Immediately her manner became cold and she looked at him with a frown.

"In what way," she asked, "are you interested in my sister ?"

"It is a pity," he replied, "that Clifford introduced me by my Army rank. I am Detective Inspector Leslie of the C.I.D."

Her eyebrows were slightly raised and she insolently lifted her lorgnette and surveyed him through them.

"Indeed !" she murmured cuttingly. "I had no idea that Mr. Clifford numbered policemen among his acquaintances."

Leslie felt hot all over and his boyish face became red with wrath. He managed to force a smile, however.

"You will, no doubt," he declared, "regard Clifford as a man of good taste for the future."

"Possibly," she retorted, "I may find it necessary to remonstrate with him on his execrable lack of taste in presenting an inspector of police to me."

"And yet," he said quietly, "it was only recently, if my information is correct, that you succeeded in your ambition of being elected to the ladies committee in Kenilworth, of which my mother is chairwoman."

Mrs. Wilbur Cummings' whole body suddenly became rigid and remained so for an appreciable period, then it relaxed and she looked at her companion with a most charming smile.

"Are you really the son of Sir Pellingham and Lady Leslie ?" she inquired.

"I am," he replied shortly.

"I had no idea," she assured him. "Of course I had heard that you were connected in some way with Scotland Yard, but never inquired in what capacity. I must tell Lady Leslie that I have met you — she will be charmed."

"Undoubtedly !" murmured Dennis.

She leaned forward.

"Mr. Clifford," she said reproachfully, "why didn't you tell me that Major — er — Inspector Leslie was the son of dear Lady Leslie ?"

"It never occurred to me to mention it," replied Clifford truthfully.

"May I have those few words about your sister ?" ventured Leslie.

She bit her lip, but nodded, then, turning to her escort;

"Will you men leave us alone for a few minutes ?" she asked. "Major Leslie and I are going to exchange confidences."

They rose obediently and sauntered away.

"You may not know," she said with some asperity as soon as they were out of hearing, "that the subject you insist on discussing is one that is distasteful to me. My sister and I are not on very good terms."

"So I understand," nodded Leslie, "but surely, in the present unfortunate state of affairs, you are keenly anxious about her welfare."

She shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"I suppose I am interested," she acknowledged, "but I am convinced that no actual harm will come to her. No doubt she has brought this trouble upon herself."

Leslie was rather shocked by her heartlessness.

"Ten years ago," he asked, "when Armitage was on trial for the manslaughter of Dr. Whitelaw, were you on good terms with your sister ?"

"Our disagreement," she stated coldly, "dated from that time."

"Perhaps you felt that she was not exactly sincere in her evidence at the trial ?"

"It is a matter I would rather not discuss. The awful publicity of that affair caused my husband and me a great deal of distress."

"Naturally ! But surely, if you believed in your sister, that was no reason why you should cease to have anything to do with her ?"

"Perhaps my husband and I regard things in a different light from you. At all events the unenviable notoriety which enveloped her was quite sufficient, in our opinion, to cause us to alter the intimate relationship that had previously existed between us."

"You are quite certain there was nothing else ?"

She looked at him haughtily.

"I'm afraid I do not understand you," she said.

"I want to know," he explained, "whether you knew of anything which might have given quite a different complexion to the trial — anything that, perhaps, did not show up your sister in a very favourable light ?"

"Why do you ask ?"

"Because Armitage undoubtedly feels that he has a very deep grievance against Mrs. Pennington and, if she had been perfectly honest in her statements, it is hardly likely that he would have nursed a grudge against her for ten years."

"You are suggesting that what that villain said at the trial may have been true ?"

Leslie shrugged his shoulders.

"I am asking you," he said bluntly, "whether *you* know that it was so."

"I am perfectly certain," she stated, "that my sister told the truth. She would never behave in any way discreditable to her family."

"And yet relations between you have been strained ever since !"

"For the reason I have given you."

"I'm sorry," he objected, "but that reason is not logical."

She frowned but made no comment.

"Why are you asking me these questions ?" she asked after a pause.

"Because I am anxious to see daylight in this case," he informed her.

"Are you the Inspector Leslie who has been mentioned in the papers so much lately ?"

"I am," he admitted, smiling ruefully.

"Well, from all accounts," she continued, with obvious malice, "you do not appear to have been particularly successful in your efforts to track this scoundrel Armitage. He has abducted Sir Fellowes Allen, murdered the man Smithers, and kidnapped my sister right under your very eyes, and yet you are wasting your time inquiring into my sister's past. I should like to know exactly how the events of ten years ago are going to help you to solve the mystery of my sister's present whereabouts."

"Quite a lot," he replied vaguely.

She made an exclamation of impatience.

"No wonder the papers are so incensed against the police," she declared. "Here is a man at large — a criminal of the very worst type, who has murdered one man, kidnapped another and not only that, but has abducted a poor defenceless woman for prob-

ably some vile and diabolical scheme, which one dare not even imagine, while the police stand by and twiddle their thumbs — "

"And yet," interrupted Leslie suavely, "you do not appear to be anxious on her behalf and actually state that she has brought the trouble on herself. I am quite convinced, Mrs. Cummings," he went on, "that you know a great deal more than you are prepared to say and that your disagreement with your sister was caused by that knowledge."

"You are perfectly entitled to your own opinion," she said disdainfully. "I think it would be as well if we changed the subject. It is extremely distasteful to me."

"One moment !" he begged. "When your sister became Mrs. Pennington, were you present at the wedding ?"

"I was not," was the immediate reply. "In fact I received no invitation and knew nothing about it until some time afterwards."

"She was married in Dublin, was she not ?"

"I believe so. Her husband is a Dublin man."

"She left immediately after the wedding for the Argentine ?"

She nodded.

"So I understand," she said.

"Did she ever communicate with you while she was in Buenos Aires ?"

"No."

"Nor you with her ?"

"No."

"When did you know that she was back in London ?"

She hesitated.

"The first intimation I had," she admitted a trifle reluctantly, "was when I read the paper describing her abduction."

"I see."

He was thoughtful for a few minutes.

"Would you mind telling me," she asked, "what the exact significance of these questions is ?"

"I just wanted to know," he replied lamely.

"Oh, why don't you people do something," she cried impatiently. "After all she is my sister and there is a possibility that she may be in very acute distress at this moment. The man

Armitage must be an utter fiend. It is time he was caught and hanged. My sister and I may have differences but I shall never forgive the police if any harm comes to her."

He rose to his feet.

"You may rest assured," he said, "that no harm will come to your sister, at least through Armitage. On the contrary it is quite likely that a good deal of unpleasantness may come to her from a totally different quarter."

"What do you mean ?"

"I cannot stay any longer now," he asserted. "Will you give me permission to call back the gentlemen who escorted you here ?"

She held out her hand.

"I have found you quite entertaining, Inspector Leslie," she declared. "I hope you will succeed in capturing Armitage and his gang."

"Armitage," he assured her, "will be in my hands within a week."

He bowed over her hand and returned to Morrison who had been waiting his return with impatience. The two detectives at once left the hotel and returned to Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER XXVI

LESLIE HAS A STIRRING NIGHT

That evening Inspector Leslie called on Sir Phillip Humphreys. He found the barrister a greatly changed man. There were deep circles under his eyes, and his manner was nervous and irritable. He lived in Curzon Street, but he might have been in the wilds surrounded by enemies judging from his behaviour. The slightest sound out of the ordinary made him jump, and he had developed a habit of glancing over his shoulder every few minutes as though apprehending an attack from the rear.

"I can't help it," he explained to Leslie apologetically as they sat in his study. "This business has upset my nerves to such an extent that I can't sleep, I can't eat, and my work is suffering disastrously."

"There is no reason for you to fear," consoled the inspector. "There has been one attempt at least to get hold of you, but it has failed, as all will fail."

"Why talk such banalities to me," complained Humphreys querulously. "You know as well as I do that Armitage has the cunning of the devil himself. He threatened five of us and already he has murdered one and abducted two others, despite all your precautions. At first I laughed at his threats, rather enjoyed living under the protection of the police in fact, but the knowledge of his diabolical cleverness, and the strain of the thing, has demoralized me. In God's name are you going to trap him, or is he going to win all along the line ?"

"I anticipate that he will be in my hands within a week," asserted Leslie, repeating his remark to Mrs. Wilbur Cummings.

Humphreys gripped the arm of his chair.

"Is that based on your knowledge of his whereabouts?" he demanded, "or is it merely surmise."

"I am willing to bet on it," the detective assured him.

For the first time a look of relief crossed the face of the barrister.

"I only hope you are right," he said. "If this sort of thing goes on much longer, I'll be a nervous wreck. I suppose you think I'm a coward — I'm not! It's the uncertainty of it all that is so trying. If Armitage stood before me alone, I'd face him with the greatest pleasure." He laughed harshly. "I should have no fear of the outcome!"

He tapped the pocket of his coat significantly.

"When you get him," he went on, "there won't be any doubt of his sentence this time. He'll hang! I may be his cousin but I shall feel relieved when the world is rid of him."

"Why do you hate him?" asked Leslie quietly.

"Wouldn't you hate a man, even though he were related to you, if he turned out to be an utter scoundrel and thought as little of murdering a human being as he would of killing a fly? Wouldn't you hate him if he held a threat over your head that made you a nervous wreck, broke your spirit, and threatened to turn your life into disaster? Already I have lost more money in fees over him than I care to calculate. I actually have to refuse briefs because I cannot settle my mind to them. Yes, I do hate him, and on the day he hangs I will not feel the slightest regret. Why should I?"

Leslie regarded him with disgust.

"Have you had any threatening letters from him?" he asked.

Humphreys nodded.

"Yes, one," he admitted. "I think it was the day after he kidnapped Sir Fellowes."

"May I see it?"

Sir Phillip unlocked a drawer in his writing-table and took out a sheet of paper which he handed to Leslie. The latter read the following communication—

This comes to you as a warning. It is my intention to make you either my second or third victim. I have not decided yet. The others will all be punished and, whether or not you are spared

for the time being, you can be quite certain that your turn will follow sooner or later.

John Armitage

"May I keep this ?" asked the inspector when he had perused the coldly worded notification.

"Keep it and do what you like with it," urged the barrister. "I don't want the beastly thing."

Leslie put it into his pocket and rose to his feet.

"Why don't you go down to the country for a while ?" he asked. "You'd be quite safe there."

"I shall go in a few days," declared Sir Phillip, "as soon as the courts are closed. They are remaining open longer this year on account of the unprecedented pressure of work. By the way," he seemed to have recovered a certain amount of his courage; "what has happened to the one remaining companion of my peril ?"

"You mean Charles Stannard ?"

Humphreys nodded. Leslie smiled reminiscently.

"He is the very reverse of you, Sir Phillip," he said. "He speaks of Armitage with the greatest contempt and doesn't appear to mind whether he is threatened or not. As you probably know, he retired from domestic service shortly after Dr. Whitelaw's death and took a public house in Plumstead. It is the greatest delight of his life now to pose as a threatened man before his customers. He's a fool, but he has courage."

"I'm not sure that that isn't an insinuation," said Humphreys with a frown.

"Not at all," objected Leslie. "I have never said that you have no courage. If I were asked I would say that you had rather more imagination than your fair share, but did not lack courage."

Before leaving the house he had a private and important conversation with the detective who slept in Humphreys' dressing-room, and left certain instructions with the man which the latter duly carried out.

Following a sudden decision, Dennis then went to Plumstead and interviewed Stannard. He was closetted with him for a long time, and when he left he wore a grim look which was not usual with him. Stannard followed him to his car, and the latter's face

was white and drawn — there was something else there also which might easily have been hate.

"I don't know what your idea is, Mr. Leslie," he said, "but, I assure you, you are mistaken in thinking that I was bribed on that occasion, or that there was anybody hidden in the room."

Leslie shrugged his shoulders and pressed the self-starter.

"Where did you get the money to buy this house ?" he asked.

"My savings," replied the ex-butler sullenly.

"Nonsense !" snapped Leslie. "I only wish I knew who your benefactor was !"

He drove home rather slowly for him but, as a matter of fact, his brain was working at full pressure, and even he realized that to drive rapidly through the streets of London when his mind was not on what he was doing was the quickest and most likely way of courting disaster. He spent a long time in his den that night with various articles spread on the desk in front of him and a notebook on one side in which he wrote from time to time. Apparently the result of his labour was eminently satisfactory for he rose at last, locked everything in a drawer, and stretched himself on a sofa in the drawing-room with a sigh of perfect contentment. Hawkins came in, mixed him a whisky and soda, and handed him a favourite pipe.

He remained where he was for half an hour, then rose, this time with a sigh of regret, and called for his man. Hawkins came in with an overcoat and a tweed cap, and helped his master into the former. He himself was dressed in a British Warm which had been presented to him by Leslie and, after mixing another whisky and soda for the inspector, he helped himself to one at the latter's bidding. The clock was striking eleven as they quietly made their way down the stairs.

With Hawkins sitting by his side, Leslie drove rapidly to Oxford Street then, turning due east, went on through Holborn, Stepney, and Poplar, and eventually drew up outside a police station in Limehouse. He left Hawkins in the car and went inside. He found an inspector awaiting him, and greeted him affably.

"Hullo, Graves !" he said. "Had any luck with Mother Dunn at the *Old Ship ?"*

"Not a bit," replied the slight, dark-haired man whom he had addressed; "but I've got an idea."

Leslie whistled in pretended astonishment.

"Do you have ideas down here ?" he asked in mock surprise.

Graves smiled and showed two rows of perfect teeth.

"Far more than you folk at headquarters would imagine," he replied.

"Well, trot it out ! What is this great idea ?"

"I've come to the conclusion that there is a small arm of the river running up to the back of Mother Dunn's place by an old disused wharf. Mind you, it's only an idea, there may be nothing in it, but it's worth investigating."

"Rather !" exclaimed Leslie. "If you are right, it would account for these people being able to get in and out of the *Old Ship* without being spotted by you, and presumably they do. How far is the wharf from the public house ?"

"Not more than fifty yards. There was once a road leading to it, but it is now, more or less, used as a timber yard by a Jew who isn't above suspicion himself. The pub stands facing the road with its back to the wharf, so who is to know what goes on behind ? If you like we'll get Johnson to take us along there on our way back."

Leslie nodded.

"Yes," he agreed; "we can't afford to take it for granted that the place is innocent. Shall we be off now ?"

He and Graves walked out of the police station and Leslie stopped for a moment to give instructions to Hawkins.

"I may be gone for hours," he said, "so get inside and chum up with the sergeant on duty. It's warmer in there and it's quite likely he'll find a bottle of beer for you."

"But what about the car, sir ?"

"It ought to be all right outside a police station, but one never knows. Anyhow if you have a look at it every now and again that will be good enough."

Hawkins touched his cap and indicated that it would be the strangest thing that had ever happened in the world's history if the car was stolen when he was anywhere by. Leslie and Graves went on down the road with this assurance, and after walking for

about ten minutes they came to a narrow lane down which they cut, arriving a few minutes afterwards at a small jetty which contained a long low building belonging to the river police. Three men were awaiting them there — a sergeant and two others, and Graves introduced Leslie to the former.

"I understand, sir," remarked Sergeant Johnson to the Scotland Yard man, "that you have a suspicion that the man Armitage has a hiding-place down the river. Have you any idea whereabouts ?"

Leslie shook his head.

"Not the slightest," he replied. "He may have a house somewhere, but I am inclined to the theory that he is on some sort of boat."

"You mean a yacht ?"

"I really couldn't say. My informant was extremely vague and it was obvious that he himself didn't know."

The sergeant scratched his head.

"I'm afraid we're going on a wild goose chase," he observed; "but we'll get off and I'll take you to all the likely craft lying between here and Tilbury — those that I'm not intimate with I mean."

The five men walked along the quay and embarked on a large motor boat which lay alongside. A cold wind had sprung up and a drizzle began to fall. Johnson gave the two inspectors oilskins and sou'-westers to put on.

"You'll want these," he said. "It is going to be rather a damp trip I'm afraid."

As soon as they had left the shelter of the wharf they found that his prognostication looked like being fulfilled. The water was choppy and every now and again they were covered with spray as the swift vessel cut her way through the waves. Leslie made a grimace. He and Graves were sitting in a stuffy little cabin that afforded poor protection against the weather.

"We're in for an uncomfortable few hours," he observed.

"I'm afraid so," replied the other. "I don't know how you feel about it but I prefer to do my crook-hunting on shore. This sort of thing doesn't appeal to me at all, especially on a dark and unpleasant night like this."

Leslie filled his pipe and succeeded in lighting it after the wind had wasted half a box of matches.

"One can smoke," he said, "and that's a comfort anyway."

They spent a very dismal couple of hours without one little ray of hope to help dispel the gloom of their disagreeable experience. They hailed half-a-dozen boats between Erith and Purfleet, and boarded a craft lying off Greenhithe which was apparently deserted, and had no riding lights, but it proved to be quite an innocent vessel, the owner being a careless individual who forgot about the necessity for lights. Another boat — a large black yacht — anchored near Gravesend attracted their attention and, when Johnson hailed it and received no reply, they went alongside, and he and Leslie boarded her. At first they thought she was deserted, but they found the man, who was supposed to be on watch, sprawled on the deck fast asleep. Johnson prodded him with his foot and he sprang up with an oath. At first he was inclined to resent their intrusion, but the magic word police calmed him down and he informed them that his owner was the Dutch millionaire, Von Hueffel. It did not take long to verify his statement, and the two police officers returned to their boat.

"You were right, Johnson," said Leslie at last; "this is a wild goose chase, and I think we had better give it up for tonight. Our only hope seems to be the *Old Ship*. Take us to the wharf behind it !"

It seemed a long, tiring trip back, and both Leslie and Graves were thoroughly weary of the River Thames long before they reached their destination. Once a very high-powered motor boat, going in the same direction, overhauled and slid past them almost as though they were standing still.

"By Jove !" exclaimed Graves admiringly. "That fellow can move."

"I think she's from one of the yachts down Tilbury way," said Johnson. "I've seen her once or twice lately."

"I wonder what she's doing out at this time of the morning," speculated Leslie. "I wish you could catch her. I'd rather like to make the acquaintance of the owner, or whoever is aboard."

"I doubt if there is a craft on the river could catch her," opined Johnson. "She's a racer if ever there was one."

"Which makes her all the more suspicious," observed Leslie. "Have you always seen her at night ?"

"Yes," admitted Johnson, "and generally going the other way, but never as late as this."

"I suppose you can't be absolutely certain that she is the same ?"

"Not absolutely; but I'd be prepared to bet on it with fair chances of winning."

"I don't know whether it's instinct or what it is," said Leslie after a few minutes deep thought, "but I have a feeling that we shall see that boat again quite soon."

It was past three when Johnson finally announced that they were approaching the old wharf. The engine was shut off and they drifted in quietly. One of the men, standing in the bows, hooked on to the rotting old structure, and Johnson and the two inspectors stepped ashore. With as little noise as possible they made a thorough search but found nothing suspicious, and Leslie began to feel a keen sense of disappointment.

"I'm afraid your belief," he murmured to Graves, "that there is a small arm of the river running up to the back of Mother Dunn's, is only an idea after all. At any rate there is no sign of anything like that."

"No," replied Graves; "I'm afraid I was wrong. But we are deucedly handicapped without a light. Let's risk a lamp ! You use it and I'll keep my coat over it to shade the rays. It's hardly likely anybody'll be looking out of the pub this time of the morning."

Leslie agreed, an electric torch was procured from the boat, and the two of them recommenced their search taking care to shield the beams as best they could. However, they were as unsuccessful as before, and were returning to the police launch, when Leslie stopped and threw the rays of the torch on to an old piece of sacking that lay at his feet. He kicked it aside and, at once, gave vent to a low exclamation. A trapdoor had been framed in the rotting timbers of the old wharf, and was obviously of quite recent construction. He handed the lamp to Graves and, bending down, caught hold of a ring and pulled. Immediately the trapdoor rose and the two detectives looked through the hole. Directly under them they could see the stern of a boat and, with-

out hesitation, they each in turn dropped down leaving Johnson to await their return above.

They found themselves standing on a large motor speed-boat, and at once set about inspecting her. She was beautifully built, and Leslie examined her engines with a feeling of admiration. Amidships was a roomy cabin which could easily have accommodated eight persons, and her tapering bows were sheathed entirely in steel forming a hurricane deck underneath which was room for at least two men to lie sheltered. Dennis gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"I'll take my oath," he murmured, "that this is the boat that passed us at such headlong speed, and ten to one it belongs to Armitage."

"What do you propose to do ?" asked Graves. "Raid the pub, and find the men who were aboard ?"

"Good Lord; no ! I don't want them to know we have discovered their secret yet, but to-morrow night I shall return as soon as it is dark and, if she's still here, I'll hide under this deck. Then when they make their trip — if they do make a trip — I'll go with them !"

"Rather a risk, isn't it ?" commented Graves.

"I've taken worse."

He stepped onto the bows and looked ahead.

"There is a rowboat in front of us," he announced.

Followed by his companion, he let himself down into the little craft and, stepping over the pile of oars, seats, and tarpaulins that littered her, found himself able to step ashore. For some time he and Graves, with the aid of the torch, looked cautiously about them. They were in a yard that had the appearance of a rubbish dump. All round them the place was piled high with refuse of all sorts. Going forward carefully, and switching out the light for fear of being seen, they managed to find their way along a narrow path until they discovered themselves close to the house. Satisfied, they retraced their steps, climbed over the rowboat onto the launch, and made their way to the stern once more.

Leslie examined the wharf. The piles on the seaward side were much closer together than is usual in a jetty — in fact they were practically touching. A cleverly disguised sliding-door had

been fitted in them, directly behind the motor boat, to enable her to go in and out of her hiding-place. After he and Graves had satisfied themselves that they had discovered all that there was to be seen, they hauled themselves up through the trapdoor and, with Johnson, returned to the launch. A moment later they drifted away from the old wharf and, as soon as they were well out, the engine was started and they returned to the police quay.

"It has been a pretty putrid night," commented Leslie, "but it's been well worth the trouble."

The car had not been stolen, but Hawkins admitted that he had had the greatest difficulty in keeping awake. Dennis made arrangements to meet Graves on the following night as soon after eleven as possible.

"Unfortunately," he grumbled, "the Home Secretary has called a conference and I have to be present, otherwise I should be down here at ten. Of course, if the conference lasts until very late, it won't be worth while my coming, unless I can get away."

Dawn had broken before he and Hawkins arrived back in Maida Vale, and both of them were very weary as they struggled up the stairs to the flat. Leslie unlocked the door and threw it open, bending, at the same time, to pick up a circular that was lying on the floor. As he did so there was a terrific explosion and a shower of plaster fell all round them, while their nostrils were filled with the acrid fumes of some form of explosive. From all over the building came the sound of doors being opened and the startled voices of people asking each other what had happened. Two or three girls appeared on the landing with white faces, and with dressing-gowns wrapped hastily round them, and cried out in consternation as they noticed the white faces and dishevelled appearances of Leslie and Hawkins. The former did his best to reassure them and, after some time, succeeded in persuading them to go back to bed. Then he and his servant entered the flat and conducted a thorough search of every room. There was not a sign of anybody and, at last, having assured themselves that the flat was empty and that there were no other traps to be feared, they returned to the hall and contemplated the door which was leaning drunkenly outwards, being completely torn off one hinge and only just hanging by the other.

"Some sort hof bomb I should think, sir," speculated Hawkins. To hear him speak one would imagine that an explosion in the flat was an everyday occurrence.

Leslie nodded.

"A Mills I imagine," he replied. "It was cleverly fixed. Probably when I pushed open the door the pin was withdrawn. Ah, yes," he added; "here it is hanging to a piece of twine. Well, Hawkins, we've had a very narrow escape. This circular no doubt saved my life, as I bent down, when I opened the door, and picked it up. But how did you get off? You were directly behind me, weren't you?"

"No, sir, I was still hon the stairs. We were lucky, sir, hif it was a Mills, because them things hit you hanywhere and hanyhow."

"I think it was an old relic of the war," observed Leslie, "and might have lost some of its pristine freshness. If I am not mistaken I saw it this evening acting as an ornament on a mantelpiece."

Hawkins whistled.

.."Then you know who the fellow his, who tried to do you hin?" he queried.

Dennis nodded.

"If I am not very much mistaken," he said, "his name is Stannard and he owns a public house down Plumstead way."

"I wonder how he got hin," puzzled Hawkins.

"It's not a very difficult job," replied Leslie, "but I refuse to speculate any further — I am going to bed."

"Ain't you going to harrest him, sir?"

"What — now?"

"Yes, sir."

"I certainly am not. I am going to tumble into bed just as quickly as I can."

"What habout the door, sir! How hare we going to lock hup?"

"Leave it alone!" yawned the inspector.

He wandered away to his bedroom and five minutes later there was not a sound in the flat.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CRIME MINISTER

Charles Stannard was superintending the polishing of glasses behind his bar preparatory to opening the public house, when a taxi drew up outside his private entrance and a burly man with a large moustache, dressed in a blue serge suit and wearing a bowler hat that appeared to be too small for him, alighted and rang the bell. He was accompanied by another man who was undoubtedly a policeman in plainclothes.

Mrs. Stannard opened the door and was requested to call her husband, who appeared after some hesitation but without apparently suspecting trouble.

"Hallo, Charlie," greeted Inspector Morrison affably. "We haven't met since you and I were witnesses in the Armitage trial. How are you?"

"I'm all right," replied Stannard with no great heartiness. In fact he suddenly looked thoroughly ill at ease and there was a sickly expression in his face that indicated fear. "I don't remember you," he added.

"Don't you? That's a pity!" said Morrison in reproachful tones. "My name's Morrison, then a sergeant, now an inspector."

"What do you want?" asked Stannard sullenly.

"Can we go somewhere where we can talk without being overheard?"

The ex-butler reluctantly led the way into the room he designated as the parlour. The plainclothes man, entering last, closed the door and leaned against it.

"Now what is it all about?" growled Stannard.

"I've a warrant for your arrest, my lad," said Morrison sternly, "on a charge of attempting to murder Detective Inspector Leslie."

A look of positive terror flashed for a moment across the face of the man and he clutched at the arm of a chair for support, then he succeeded, by an almost superhuman effort, in gaining control of himself.

"What are you babbling about?" he gasped. "When did I attempt to murder Mr. Leslie?"

"Last night! By some means you got into his flat and arranged a Mills bomb in such a way that, when he opened the door, the pin was withdrawn and the bomb exploded. Luckily it was more or less a dud, and didn't do as much damage as it might have done, otherwise you would have had murder on your conscience — if you have one — and not only the murder of one person, but probably of two."

"What a damn silly tale," sneered Stannard. "Of course Leslie can prove it?"

Morrison nodded.

"He found the pin tied to a piece of string," he said, "and on that pin was a number. While waiting in this house to speak to you yesterday he saw a Mills bomb on the mantelpiece. Being interested in that sort of thing, he examined it and subconsciously noted the number on it. It corresponded to the number on the pin."

All the fight went out of Stannard after that and he collapsed into a chair.

"Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"You're coming along to Scotland Yard," announced Morrison, "and you're going to stay there for a few days. Leslie has decided not to prosecute you just yet. Are you coming quietly or do you want the darbies on?"

"I'll come quietly," muttered the cowed man, and he rose from his chair and staggered across the room.

Out in the passage he took a hat from the rack and called to his wife. She came hurrying from some other part of the house and, as soon as she saw his face, cried out in alarm.

"Why, what's the matter, Charlie?" she asked fearfully. "You look dreadful!"

"It's nothing, Nellie," he replied slowly. "These — these — gentlemen want me to go to Scotland Yard with them, that's all."

"Why ?" she demanded, her face going pale with dread.

"It's the best way of keeping him safe," interposed Morrison, "until we've laid Armitage by the heels."

Stannard shot a grateful glance at him and the woman's face cleared.

"Oh !" she exclaimed, "you gave me such a shock. How long will you keep him there, mister ?"

"A few days," said Morrison. "He'll let you know if he wants anything and you can bring or send it along."

During the long journey to Scotland Yard, Stannard did not say a word. All his courage and boastfulness had evaporated, and his customers would hardly have recognized the landlord who was so fond of talking about the threat which Armitage held over his head, and which he had regarded as a very good advertisement. On arrival at the Yard, Morrison handed him over to a sergeant on duty and made his way to Leslie's office.

"Get him ?" asked the latter shortly.

Morrison nodded and described the arrest.

"As soon as I told him about the number on the pin," he concluded, "he collapsed, and he is obviously a guilty man. I'm hanged if I know why he went to such lengths to get rid of you. Why should he fear you ?"

"Because during my little chat with him yesterday," replied Leslie, "I told him enough to show him that he was in queer street if I continued certain investigations I am making. I gave him the chance, as a matter of fact, of turning King's evidence."

"The devil you did," ejaculated Morrison. "You didn't tell me you had got on as far as that."

Leslie put his hand on the burly man's shoulder and smiled at him in his boyish manner.

"If all goes well," he said, "you and I will make several arrests to-morrow, or at latest, the next day, and the papers will be able to print the biggest sensation they've had for years. After that — well, old Chilsworth will have to find us another job."

"That's all very fine," grumbled Morrison, "but I don't see where I come in. I've only acted as a sort of messenger boy in this case."

"Even messenger boys have their uses," observed Leslie with

a smile, "and you'll get a lot of credit out of the affair."

"Credit which I don't deserve," grunted the burly man.

"Nonsense ! You'll deserve it as much as I shall. What worries me is whether a certain young lady will accept me as a suitor when everything is over."

Morrison whistled long and thoughtfully.

"So that's the way the wind blows, is it ?" he asked. "Are you thinking of the girl who gave you the slip at Weybridge ?"

"She didn't give me the slip," denied Leslie indignantly.

"Well, she saw through your well-laid plans and got the better of you." Morrison's burly form shook with inward laughter. "If she can do that," he chuckled, "and accepts you as her husband, you'll have to be on your best behaviour. You won't be able to pretend you're out on a case when you're at the club, and — "

"Don't be crude !" interrupted Leslie. "And keep your dark prognostications until you hear we are engaged. Between you and me, I've as much chance of marrying her as I have of opening a police station at the North Pole. And now I'm going to take the rest of the day off, for after that beastly conference to-night, I am expecting a particularly hectic time. I shall be lucky if I get to bed at all before to-morrow night — if then !"

He interviewed a very low-spirited Stannard before going home, and found him remarkably pliant considering how obstinate he had been when Leslie had visited him the day before. However, he had left his surrender too late, as the detective pointed out to him, and he was now face to face with the serious charge of attempted murder, with an almost certain conviction to follow.

Finding that the workmen had arrived and were engaged in noisily repairing the damage, Leslie soon abandoned the flat again and went off to his club. Here he found a secluded corner and stayed there until one o'clock, when he returned home for luncheon. In spite of the hammering, he managed to get a few hours' rest and, after he had bathed and dressed, dined early and left in plenty of time to keep his appointment in Grosvenor Square.

* * * *

Sir Stanley Long paced slowly up and down his library floor as he talked in rapid tones to the grey-haired, clean shaven man with the face of a student, who leaned back in his chair listening carefully to what his host was saying. The Prime Minister had dined with the Home Secretary that evening and he had accepted the latter's invitation to be present at the conference with the police chiefs from Scotland Yard. His kindly face was spoilt by a frown at the moment, and there was a trace of anger in the keen grey eyes.

"I quite agree with you," he said, when the Home Secretary paused. "It is a matter in which the police have not shown to advantage. However, we can but hear what they have to say. Did you remark at dinner that the inspector who is actually in charge of the case is coming here to-night ?"

"Yes," replied Sir Stanley. "I want to speak to him myself and ask him what he has to say. I consider that he has failed dismally up to now, and I really think that I shall advise Stevenson to replace him, unless he has an adequate reason to give for his failure."

The Prime Minister rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I don't think I should interfere to that extent, if I were you," he observed quietly. "After all Stevenson is a very good man and he, no doubt, knows what he is doing. What is the name of the officer in charge of the case ?"

"Leslie !" answered the Home Secretary shortly.

"Ah, yes, of course ! He is the son of Sir Pellingham Leslie. I wonder what made him take up a police career."

"He was remarkably successful in the Intelligence Service during the War, and afterwards was appointed to the Special Branch of Scotland Yard where he continued to do good work. It looks as though he is ruining his reputation, however, now that he is in the Criminal Investigation Department."

Sir Stanley Long was small and stoutish, and had the pompous air of the prosperous self-made man. He was pink and white and podgy, and possessed a pair of acquisitive blue eyes. The most unpopular man in the Cabinet, general surprise had been caused when he had been appointed to his important post.

"There may be things happening of which we know nothing,"

said the Prime Minister. "It would be as well, at all events, not to jump to conclusions."

Sir Stanley made a gesture of impatience.

"I am determined to come to some understanding to-night," he declared. "If I can get no satisfaction, I shall demand that other and more experienced men be put on to the case."

The butler entered the room and announced Sir Felix Stevenson, the Commissioner of police, and Mr. Chilsworth. The Commissioner was a tall, military-looking man, broad in proportion to his height, with a great depth of chest and breadth of shoulder. His face had been tanned to the colour of a light mahogany by his many years' service under tropical suns, but the suggestion of the saturnine was relieved by a humorous mouth and a pair of wonderfully soft brown eyes.

"Well, here we are, gentlemen," he said in his booming voice, after he had shaken hands with the two Cabinet ministers. "I am not sure why you have called this conference, Long, and to tell you the truth, I feel that we can manage our business a lot better if we are left alone."

"Opinions may differ," retorted the Home Secretary coldly, and the Commissioner shrugged his shoulders and sank into a chair.

The room was an ideal one for a conference. It was large and lofty, and the walls were lined with bookshelves, whilst underfoot was a soft carpet which gave the impression that one was walking on velvet. An immense table, covered with books and papers, stood in the centre of the apartment and deep leather-covered armchairs put the finishing touch to the air of complete comfort. Large French windows before which hung heavy velvet curtains, gave access to the lawns behind the house.

Leslie arrived as the clocks were striking ten, and was immediately ushered into the library. The Commissioner greeted him with a smile, and introduced him to the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary. The Premier received him kindly, but the latter nodded abruptly and commenced talking almost at once.

"Now that we are all here," he said, "I must explain why I have invited you to this conference. I am not satisfied with the way the investigation into the whereabouts of this man Armitage is being conducted, and I feel it my duty to ask for an ex-

planation and to see if we cannot together work out a scheme that will get results. I understand that when Armitage first sent those very threatening commmunications of his to the papers, Inspector Leslie here was told to watch him and prevent any actual outrage. His arrangements were inadequate, for he allowed Armitage to escape from his vigilance and abduct Sir Fellowes Allen. This apparently did not teach him to be more careful, with the result that a man, who had also been mentioned by Armitage as a prospective victim, was brutally murdered in broad daylight. Following this came the abduction of a woman. All these enormities occurred under the very eyes of the police who were supposed — I say this advisedly — to be guarding these poor people. The papers are crying out for better methods, better organization in New Scotland Yard, and I say they are quite right. The methods of the police in this particular case are almost farcical."

"I strongly object to these remarks," boomed the Commissioner angrily.

"You have a perfect right to object," returned Sir Stanley suavely, "but your objection must contain some element of reason in it."

"Your remarks about method and organization are a direct insult to me, and before we go further with this conference, I must ask you to withdraw them, otherwise my colleagues and I will retire from this room."

He glared straight at the Home Secretary whose eyes, after a moment, faltered and fell. The Prime Minister leaned forward, and spoke earnestly to the other for a few seconds, then looked up and smiled at the three police officials.

"My colleague," he remarked, "is naturally a little heated by these terrible events, because he is intimately concerned — Sir Fellowes Allen is a very old friend of his. I am perfectly sure that he had no intention of casting a slur on police methods, or organization as a whole, and that he will readily withdraw anything in his remarks that might be construed as abusive." He turned to the Home Secretary. "Am I not right ?" he asked.

Sir Stanley Long inclined his head rather reluctantly.

"I had no intention of insulting you, Sir Felix," he said, "or of offering any criticism of your work as Commissioner, but — "

"My dear fellow," interrupted Sir Felix, "am I not responsible for method and organization of the Metropolitan police force? It is absurd of you to try and wriggle out of a situation you have created yourself."

"Shall we let that pass?" suggested the Prime Minister.

He tactfully drew the conversation into safer channels, but Long could not let it rest at that. He was a born bully, who loved power, and he had looked forward to making himself thoroughly disagreeable to these officials of police headquarters. Having found that he could not insult the Commissioner with impunity, he turned his batteries on to Leslie.

"I am sure you will all agree," he said smoothly, "that I am perfectly justified in demanding an explanation from Inspector Leslie of his mismanagement of the case." He looked at Dennis as though expecting an answer, but the latter did not oblige him. Sir Stanley frowned. "I am waiting, Inspector Leslie!" he prompted.

"What for, sir?" asked the detective, with an air of surprise.

"You heard what I said, I suppose," snapped the exasperated Cabinet minister. "I have asked you for an explanation."

"I regret I cannot give an explanation," replied Leslie stiffly, "of a statement that is entirely erroneous. In the first place I have not mismanaged this case, sir, and in the second I am not responsible for my actions to anybody but my own superior officers."

The Home Secretary's face became dark with anger. The Commissioner hid a smile, while Chilsworth looked at his subordinate in dismay. The Prime Minister put his long white fingers together and nodded his head as though in agreement.

"Am I to understand that you are defying me, sir?" demanded Sir Stanley harshly.

"Certainly not, sir," returned Leslie. "As far as I am concerned, you have nothing to do with this matter at all, and until I am told by Mr. Chilsworth, or Sir Felix Stevenson, to enter into a discussion with you about it, I am not at liberty to do so."

"You mean you will not answer any questions I may put to you?"

"I mean, sir, that I do not recognize your right to question me."

There was a dead silence for a perceptible period, then Sir

Stanley turned to the Commissioner and he spoke as though it were a great effort to subdue the wrath that was consuming him.

"Do you permit this kind of thing, Sir Felix ?" he demanded.

"Inspector Leslie is quite correct in his attitude," was the calm reply.

The Home Secretary rose and paced the room with savage steps. He had never been defied in this manner before and he found the experience extremely disagreeable. Suddenly he stopped by the Commissioner's chair and looked down at him.

"What was the sense in my calling this conference at all ?" he asked in querulous, but much calmer tones.

"None," was the stern reply. "If you leave us to do our own work without interference, I think you will find that there is nothing much wrong. I happen to know that Inspector Leslie is doing good work. He has been given *carte blanche,* and until he comes to me and declares his success, or admits his failure, I do not propose to interfere with him."

"And in the meantime," sneered the Home Secretary, "Sir Phillip Humphreys and the other man will be either murdered or abducted."

"I think," interposed the Prime Minister, "that we can continue this discussion more amicably if you resume your seat, Long."

The curtains hanging over one of the windows swayed as though blown by the wind, then they parted and a man stepped into the room. It was Armitage !

With various exclamations of surprise, the five occupants sprang to their feet and Leslie strode forward, but was immediately stopped by the sight of a revolver pointed straight at him. Four other men entered the room and placed themselves in various positions of vantage. Each carried a revolver.

"I regret I am late, gentlemen," said Armitage grimly. "No doubt you did not expect me, but I feel it incumbent to be present at a meeting which, according to the papers, so intimately concerned myself. Will you please sit down !"

Nobody moved for a moment, but upon his repeating his request, they one by one resumed their seats. His face still had the hard, bitter look, and his eyes retained their fierceness, but Leslie felt that there was something else in them which he had never

seen before — it looked almost like the dawn of a new humanity. He stared searchingly at him and began to wonder.

"I expected to find myself in illustrious company," went on Armitage, "but my highest hopes hardly included the Prime Minister." He bowed courteously to the Premier. "It seems to me that I dare not take my place amongst you without myself possessing a title of distinction, which would enable you to receive me on equal terms. We have the Commissioner of police, the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister." For a moment he paused, then continued: "Since the papers insist on dubbing me a great criminal, a master of crime, and various other high sounding but iniquitous titles, suppose I now acknowledge myself as the *Crime Minister* and take my seat amongst you !"

There was no trace of irony in his tones, only a great bitterness. He advanced to a chair near that of the Premier, and seated himself. His action galvanised Sir Stanley Long into life. The Home Secretary jumped to his feet and brought down his closed fist with resounding violence on the table.

"What is the meaning of this outrage ?" he demanded hoarsely.

Armitage made a sign to Mike Thompson who was standing close behind the Home Secretary, and the burly crook caught hold of the latter by his shoulders and pulled him back into his chair.

"Keep your seat !" commanded Armitage. "I am going to do all the talking that is necessary — at least for the present !"

Leslie looked round at his companions and, despite his annoyance, felt a certain sense of amusement as he noticed the varied emotions depicted on their countenances. The Prime Minister's face showed amazed incredulity, the Commissioner was obviously fuming with anger, as also was the Home Secretary, but in the latter's eyes was also a look of fear; Chilsworth was biting his nether lip viciously and frowning ominously. Armitage looked from one to the other, before resuming in his cold voice.

"No doubt," he remarked, "you regard this entry of myself and my companions as highly melodramatic and theatrical. Perhaps it is, but lately I seem to have become surrounded by an atmosphere of melodrama, and the present incident is merely in accord

with everything else. I presume that you gentlemen have met here to-night for the purpose of discussing me and the best means of bringing about my capture. I have come to inform you that I have no intention of being captured, until the work which I have set myself to do is completed. After that I do not mind whether I am caught or not, and the menace of a further sentence of imprisonment certainly does not worry me unduly."

"Imprisonment!" shouted Sir Stanley. "When you are in the hands of the law, you will hang, sir! Do you hear? Hang!"

"I think not," retorted Armitage coolly, "but if there is any danger of that sort of thing occurring, I had better make sure that the police do not apprehend me. I certainly have no particular desire to be hanged."

"What have you done with Sir Fellowes Allen?" demanded the Home Secretary.

"He is experiencing, as far as I am able to reproduce it," replied Armitage, "the life of a convict. He is wearing clothes of the same rough material as those which the unhappy inmates of our convict settlements wear, eating food of a similar type, and is engaged in the task of picking oakum, although I am aware that oakum picking is more or less a thing of the past. Altogether he is enduring the punishment to which he has sentenced so many of his fellow creatures, although, unfortunately, there is none of the degradation attached to it which they suffer."

"My God!" ground out Sir Stanley; "you will suffer for this!"

"I am afraid that I shall be compelled to take you back with me," threatened Armitage, "if you do not control yourself better. I understand that you are not exactly liked in the Government, and I really think that I shall be doing the country a service if I kidnap you."

The Home Secretary sank back into his chair with a look of indignant horror on his face, but he forbore to make any more remarks. The Commissioner leaned forward.

"At the moment," he said sternly, "you have the upper hand, but such a state of affairs can hardly last. However, I am presuming that there is a spark of veneration for your country's chief statesman somewhere in your composition. I appeal to you to

give the Prime Minister permission to withdraw from this room and the situation into which he has been forced."

"If the Prime Minister," conceded Armitage slowly, "will give his word of honour to inform nobody of the presence here of myself, or my companions, for half an hour, and to refrain from making any move whatever to bring about our arrest during that period, he is at perfect liberty to depart."

The Premier looked at his neighbour with an air of surprise.

"Am I to understand," he asked, "that you are actually prepared to let me walk out of this room now, if I give the undertaking for which you ask ?"

Armitage inclined his head.

"You would not break your word," he affirmed, "and knowing that, I should trust you. Before I entered this room I had no idea that you were present, sir, and it is certainly very much against my desire to put any restraint on the Prime Minister of England."

"Would you mind telling me," asked the head of the Government, "why you came here tonight ?"

Armitage slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"It may have been curiosity," he replied; "it may have been a sense of bravado. Call it what you will ! When I saw in the papers that the Home Secretary had called this conference, however, I resolved to attend, and the papers will know to-morrow that I did attend."

"What good will it do you ?" demanded the Commissioner, "to have such an incident reported in the papers."

"It will not do me, personally, much good, I admit," replied Armitage, and his eyes looked fiercely at the other, "but it will give me the satisfaction of seeing the police, whom I hate, ridiculed."

An angry gleam came into Sir Felix's soft eyes.

"Why do you hate us ?" he demanded.

"Because through you my desire for retribution looks like being defeated."

"Good God !" exclaimed the Home Secretary violently. "You abduct Sir Fellows Allen and Mrs. Pennington, and murder the man Smithers; yet you say your desires are being defeated."

"They *are* being defeated," snapped Armitage, "and that man is the cause!" He pointed his finger at Leslie.

All eyes were fixed on the boyish-looking detective who, of all the gentlemen called to the Home Secretary's conference, was obviously the least perturbed.

"You are paying me a compliment, Armitage," he observed quietly, "which is undeserved. Sir Stanley Long will inform you that I have made a mess of things. In fact one of his objects in calling me here to-night was to demand an explanation of my failure to apprehend you, or to prevent your committing the numerous outrages with which you are apparently living up to your self-styled title of crime minister."

"Sir Stanley Long," declared Armitage deliberately, "evidently does not know what he is talking about. But I warn you, Leslie, that I will not have you running counter to my plans and, if you and I come into contact with each other, you will have to take the consequences!"

"I am prepared to risk that," retorted Leslie, "and in my turn I warn you that I will arrest you before the week is out."

For a few moments the two looked steadily at each other, then Armitage turned aside contemptuously.

"Bluff!" he declared. He spoke once more to the Prime Minister. "I am waiting, sir," he said, with a note of courtesy in his voice, "for you to give the assurance for which I asked."

"I prefer to stay," decided the Premier.

"I fail to see," remarked the Commissioner, "how you expect to get away, now you have joined us."

"Do you really suppose," responded Armitage sarcastically, "that I and my companions were imitating the story of the spider and the fly? If you do, you are far too innocent to be at the head of the Metropolitan Police Force. I assure you that we came well prepared. When we leave this room you will all be tied up and gagged!"

The five men glanced at each other with looks of impotent rage. Leslie jumped to his feet and took a step in the direction of Armitage, but five revolvers immediately covered him and he returned to his chair. For some reason or other he laughed as he

sat down, and the Home Secretary shot a look of perplexity at him.

"It is useless, Leslie," observed Armitage, "to attempt anything of that sort. We are all armed !"

"So I perceive !" remarked the detective, and laughed again.

A barely perceptible suggestion of unease showed for a moment in the millionaire criminal's eyes, then he rose to his feet.

"There is no sense in our remaining longer," he observed. "There is just one thing I want to say before I go — possibly it is the real reason that brought me here to-night. When I have completed my scheme of vengeance, I am prepared to hand myself over to the police on one condition — "

"And that ?" prompted Chilsworth, speaking for the first time.

"Is a guarantee from the Commissioner that no charge shall be preferred against any of my six companions on account of their association with me."

Steve Hardy, who had been standing by the door, stepped forward.

"I, for one, Mr. Armitage," he declared, "am not prepared to accept any sacrifice of that kind from you."

Armitage glared at him fiercely.

"Mind your own business, Hardy !" he snapped.

"This is very much my business," retorted the crook smoothly.

"Am I to understand," interpolated the Commissioner, "that you will surrender yourself at once, if I give you that guarantee ?"

"Not at once," replied Armitage, "but when I am satisfied that my retribution has been completed."

"I refuse to consider such an arrangement," said Sir Felix stiffly.

Armitage shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he remarked indifferently, "you will get none of us."

"On the contrary, Armitage," asserted Leslie, "I will get you all."

The ex-convict ignored his remark.

"Tie them up !" he ordered, turning to the four crooks.

"Just a minute," put in the Prime Minister, raising his hand. "It is exceedingly undignified to be bound and gagged as you

threaten. As we have no choice, I propose that you accept my word, on behalf of us all, that we make no attempt to leave this room, or give any alarm, until five minutes after you have gone."

For a few seconds Armitage stood in thought. Dan Freeman and Mike Thompson vigorously shook their heads to indicate their emphatic objection to such an arrangement. Fulcher and Hardy apparently were content to leave the matter to their leader's discretion, for they made no sign. Presently Armitage nodded.

"I will accept your word, sir," he said, "that neither you nor your companions will make the slightest attempt to leave this room or give the alarm, for *ten* minutes from the time I step through that window."

The Prime Minister inclined his head in token of assent.

"You have my word of honour !" he declared solemnly.

Armitage made a gesture towards the window, and one by one the four crooks passed behind the curtain and disappeared.

"Before you go, Armitage," said Leslie quietly, "I would like you to know that, if an account appears in the papers to-morrow of your intrusion into this room, I will arrest your catspaw, Benjamin Shadlow, and charge him with complicity."

Armitage's eyes narrowed.

"So you know that, do you ?" he growled. "It may interest you then to know also that on this occasion I had not intended employing him."

"Nevertheless," reiterated the inspector, "if the papers publish the news, he will be arrested."

The two glared at each other with a challenge in their eyes, then Armitage turned away.

"Very well," he snapped, "you win in this one thing."

He bowed ironically to the five men who were now on their feet.

"It has not been as interesting a meeting as I had hoped," he observed. "I bid you good-night, gentlemen."

No-one answered, and they watched him walk to the window with varying degrees of emotion depicted on their faces. Before he stepped behind the curtain he turned.

"It may interest you to know," he stated, "that not one of our revolvers was loaded."

"I guessed that !" retorted Leslie, and again the eyes of the two men met.

"You are infernally clever, aren't you, Leslie ?" sneered Armitage, then added: "Ten minutes from now, gentlemen !"

A moment later he had gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FROM GROSVENOR SQUARE TO TILBURY

As soon as Armitage was out of the room, the Home Secretary made straight for the door, but the Commissioner, who anticipated his intentions, stepped in the way and barred his progress.

"Where are you going ?" he demanded sternly.

"Out of my way !" cried Sir Stanley. "I am going to alarm the house and catch those villains before they can get away."

Sir Felix took him firmly by the arm and forced him to return to his chair.

"You are going to do nothing of the sort," he stated, and there was contempt in his tone. "You heard the Prime Minister give his word."

"A promise given to a scoundrel like that," retorted the Home Secretary with great heat, "is not, and never can be, binding !"

"I hope my word of honour is always binding," said the Premier quietly. "It grieves me very much, Sir Stanley," he added in sterner tones, "that you could even have thought of disregarding such a solemn undertaking."

The Home Secretary threw himself into his chair wrathfully.

"What fools you all are !" he cried. "There goes a man who is one of the worst criminals of the century, with his hands stained with the blood of a murdered victim, and you give him your word of honour to let him escape. Shame on you all !" He rose to his feet and glared from one to the other. "I tell you," he barked, "that by this act you are making yourselves accessories to his crimes."

"If the Prime Minister had not agreed to give him ten minutes' grace," interposed the Commissioner, "we should have been tied up and gagged, so what difference does it make. We have at

least come out of the affair with a certain amount of our self-respect left. Pretty fools we should have looked if the servants had come and found us bound, wouldn't we ?"

Sir Stanley ignored that side of the affair, and turned on Leslie.

"What did you mean," he demanded, "by allowing us to be baited, if you knew that those revolvers were unloaded ?"

"I didn't know," retorted Leslie; "I merely guessed."

"Why should they have been unloaded ?" asked Chilsworth.

"Loaded revolvers are dangerous things to handle, sir. They might have gone off, and Armitage would not have taken the risk of shooting any of us."

"Nonsense !" snapped the Home Secretary. "Why the man wouldn't have cared a rap whether he shot us or not. It was bluff ! I am perfectly certain that he would have butchered us all in cold blood, if it had paid him to do so."

"I am just as certain, sir," retorted Leslie, "that those revolvers were not loaded."

"Then why didn't you arrest him and his criminal companions ?"

The detective smiled, but made no reply.

"Don't be absurd, Long !" said the Commissioner. "The revolvers may not have been loaded, but I doubt if Armitage and his men would have hesitated to use the butt ends on our heads. This attitude of yours towards Leslie is ridiculous. You heard him tell Armitage that he would arrest him before the week is out — I have a feeling that he will. I am not going to interfere in what is his case by asking him why he is so confident, and I believe that Armitage knew he was not bluffing, though he said he was. Further I think you ought to be grateful to Leslie, as I am sure the rest of us are, for checkmating Armitage's intentions of sending an account of to-night's events to the papers."

The Prime Minister nodded his agreement.

"I think, Sir Stanley," he observed stiffly, "that altogether you have shown up in a very poor light to-night. It is a matter of great regret to me that the Home Secretary of my Government should prove himself to be a man lacking not only in tact and fairness, but also, I'm afraid, in honour."

Such a rebuke from his chief and before others silenced the

Home Secretary completely. He sank into his chair without a word. Chilsworth took Leslie a little aside and pretended to be discussing the books with him, and he actually did point out one or two rare editions.

"Long will have to resign after that," he whispered presently.

"Well, if he does," replied Leslie in the same low tones, "I shan't shed any tears."

At last the ten minutes had passed, and the inspector begged to be excused. He hurried out of the house and jumped into his car. It was a quarter past eleven, and his hopes of being able to trace Armitage that night were not very high. If, as he suspected, the motor launch belonged to the millionaire, and would be used to convey him back to his hiding-place, it was hardly possible for Leslie to reach it first and conceal himself in it. Armitage had ten minutes' start, and he undoubtedly had a car. It was, therefore, with the fear that he would be too late that the inspector drove eastward. He went recklessly, and the number of his car was taken repeatedly by constables who did not know it and failed to recognize the driver. He drew up outside the police station in Limehouse, after probably breaking all records for the distance, and entered to find Graves awaiting him. He astonished that officer by explaining why he had been delayed, and hurried him off towards the *Old Ship*. As he had not brought Hawkins on this occasion he placed the responsibility for the safety of his car on to the shoulders of the station sergeant.

Graves led him to the disused road that once had been the avenue to the wharf, but was now used as a timber yard. They found their way along, every now and then stumbling over obstacles that barked their shins and made their eyes water with pain but, despite their very human desire to express their feelings in strong language, they maintained an exemplary silence.

At last, after what seemed ages, they arrived at the old structure and stood still for several minutes listening. Not a sound disturbed the stillness, except the occasional barking of a dog and the hoot of the syren of some steamer making her way up or down the river.

"I'm afraid I'm too late," whispered Leslie, "but I'll have a look to make sure."

He stepped quietly along the jetty until he came to the piece of old sacking that Johnson had replaced the night before. He moved it aside and felt for the ring. Some moments awkward fumbling in the dark and he had lifted the trapdoor. He bent down and cautiously lit a match — he had brought no lamp with him. For a second or so he found it difficult to see anything, but presently he was able to focus the dim radiance of the burning match better, and he muttered an exclamation of satisfaction. Underneath him he could just make out the stern of the motor boat. He returned to Graves with quick but silent steps.

"She's still there," he whispered. "Whether or not they intend using her to-night, I don't know, but I'm going to conceal myself under the prow and await events. Will you come along and let down the trapdoor as soon as I am below ?"

Graves crept quietly back with him and Leslie let himself down. When he felt his feet firmly planted on the stern of the boat, he reminded his companion about the sacking.

"I may not be back for hours," he went on. "Perhaps nothing may happen at all — I am rather inclined to think nothing will. If so I'll lie hidden down here for a most uncomfortable time, but it's all in the game. Don't wait for me ! I'll ring you up in the morning and tell you if anything has happened, or leave a message with the sergeant to-night when I go back for my car."

"Nonsense !" ejaculated Graves. "I'm going to wait at that police station until you return, even if it isn't until nine o'clock in the morning."

"Supposing that I never return ?" asked Leslie.

"Then I'll jolly well find you," replied the other.

The two men gripped hands.

"Good luck !" murmured Graves.

He waited until he could neither see nor hear anything more of Leslie, then dropping the trapdoor softly into its place he spread the sacking over it and made his way back to the police station.

Dennis climbed along the motor launch practically on hands and knees, being compelled to trust entirely to the sense of touch. Eventually he reached the bows safely and crawled under the steel deck. He found a tarpaulin neatly folded in one corner and, drawing this into such a position that it would help to hide him from

anybody on the deck of the vessel, he lay down and, making himself as snug as he could, prepared to await events.

It was not at all comfortable where he was stretched, and after he had been there for some time, Leslie began to feel cramped, and his limbs to ache. His wrist watch had a luminous dial and he was able, therefore, to note the passing of the time. An hour and a half went by, and he became certain that the motor boat would not be used that night. He gave himself another ten minutes then, with a sigh, he dragged himself out of his hiding-place and stood up. One leg had gone to sleep and he spent some minutes rubbing it vigorously. To his surprise he suddenly became aware that he could faintly see what he was doing. Quickly he glanced up, and the next moment had dived back under cover. Somebody had come down the path from the house swinging a lamp, and presently the detective could hear footsteps on the rowboat ahead of him, followed by the sound of a man's tread on the deck above. Looking cautiously out Leslie saw a figure drop down to his level and walk to the stern of the launch, but there were others, for hardly a minute had passed before he counted four more, who all went aft and joined the man with the lamp.

"All right, Freeman," muttered a voice which Leslie recognized as Armitage's. "Push the door back but keep a sharp look out. You had better dim the lamp, Hardy !"

There was the sound of the sliding-door being opened, and immediately Dennis felt a blast of cold air. Somebody came forward and released a rope that apparently had hitched the boat to the dock, and almost at once she commenced to float out stern first. Less than two minutes later there was the sudden roar of the engine and he felt her leap forward under him like a live thing. A brilliant light was switched on somewhere, for everything was brightly illuminated and the detective crouched down lower drawing the tarpaulin up until it concealed him effectively from any quick eyes in the stern. Whether the five men were talking or not, he was unable to tell for the rush of water against the sides and the roar of the engine combined to make it impossible to hear anything else. They must have been travelling at an exceptionally high speed, inasmuch as the prow of the boat was right out of the water, and Leslie found himself placed at such an angle that it

was all he could do to prevent himself slipping towards the stern. He decided that he had never experienced anything quite so uncomfortable before, and resolved never to ride in the prow of a motor speed boat again if he could possibly help it.

They slowed down once and the bright light was switched off. Apparently they were passing a large steamer for Leslie heard the beat of propellers followed by a curious rocking sensation as they were caught in the wash. Directly afterwards someone spoke excitedly.

"Here comes that blessed patrol boat," said the voice. "I bet they'd have a look at us if they could."

"Let her out, Freeman," ordered Armitage, "and pass them at full speed !"

Once more the throb of the engine rose to a prolonged roar and Leslie smiled to himself. Johnson was probably on the other boat, cursing the fate that prevented him from boarding the speedy craft that had intrigued him so much.

Twenty minutes later they swung round to port so sharply that the detective actually went sprawling over onto his face. However, he recovered quickly and dragged himself back into his corner. Directly afterwards all the lights went out and the engine was shut off, but the launch had such way on her that they glided a considerable distance before a man, who had come forward, apparently caught on to a rope hanging from somewhere and pulled her up. He whistled and was at once answered from above. A few seconds later there was a sliding sound and a bump.

"You'd better come up, Freeman," said Armitage's voice. "I'll send Curly Summers back with the boat. Have you tied her securely ?"

"Yes," was the gruff reply.

Followed the shuffling of men's feet and Leslie felt vastly intrigued. It was obvious that they were alongside a ship of some sort, and he had greatly admired the skill with which the motor boat had been brought up to the other. But he felt somewhat anxious. It was absolutely necessary that he should get out of his hiding-place, and have a good look round, otherwise how was he to recognize the ship and her moorings again ! He waited until it seemed that the last of the men had ascended, then crawled

cautiously out and stood up. Unfortunately it was so dark that he could hardly see a thing. The launch appeared to be secured to the bulk of some craft, but what, it was impossible to tell; there was not a light showing anywhere. A rope ladder was dangling within a few feet of him and he felt an almost irresistible desire to climb up and investigate. He became aware of the smell of rotting wood and, stepping to the side of the boat, he drew his hand along the surface of the larger craft. For some time he was puzzled — there was no doubt that it was an old wooden ship of some sort — then enlightenment broke upon him.

Armitage had apparently chosen, as his retreat, one of the numerous hulks that lay rotting in the backwaters of the Thames. It was left now for Leslie to ascertain which one. He decided that if he was to make this necessary discovery, he could not travel back to Limehouse hidden in the same place as that in which he had made the outward trip. Judging, however, from Armitage's remark, there would be Curly Summers only in the launch on the homeward journey, and he would be fairly safe squatting in front of the cabin, at least while there was no light on.

He returned to the shelter of the hurricane deck and sat down to await the coming of Summers. As on the night before, a drizzle had commenced to fall and a chill wind was blowing. The detective realized with a shiver that long before he reached Limehouse again, he would be a very wet and a very cold man, but that sort of thing was all part of his job, and he felt that he had nothing to grumble at.

It was not long before he heard the sound of feet descending the rope ladder, then a low whistle, followed by the bumping noise made by the rope ladder as it was drawn up. A few seconds later the roar of the engine recommenced, and the speedy craft was cutting her way through the water again. Crawling on hands and knees, Leslie reached the forepart of the cabin and sat with his back to it. His foreboding of an unpleasantly wet passage was soon realized. The rain was now coming down in a steady downpour and the spray, as the sharp prow of the boat cut swiftly through the water, came aboard and drenched him to the skin, but he hardly noticed it; he was too much occupied in keeping a look-out. Ahead of him he caught sight of several

lights which, as they drew nearer, turned out to be the riding-lights of vessels anchored in the river. Summers switched on his own lights — all of which were apparently controlled by electricity — as he swung out from the creek and turned to go up the Thames, and Leslie caught sight of a broken-down windmill standing on the point, and a large white yacht anchored close in.

"I don't think I shall miss the turning when I come back," he muttered with satisfaction.

A little later he recognized the lights of Tilbury on the starboard side and Gravesend on the other, and felt assured that he could not go wrong. "Curly" did not drive the boat as fast as Freeman had done, but nevertheless they covered the journey very rapidly, but not rapidly enough for Leslie, who was in a state of cold, clammy discomfort. He was undecided in his own mind whether to take Summers and the launch into custody or to give no hint of his discovery. Eventually he decided that it would be unwise to arrest the Cockney just yet, in case Armitage discovered it and took alarm. He, therefore, crawled back to his original hiding-place under the steel deck as soon as he saw that they were approaching Limehouse.

The sliding-door in the wharf had been left open and, after he had shut off the engine and all but one light, Summers headed straight for it and steered the craft into its shelter. It brought up with a bump that gave Leslie a thorough shaking, but there were fenders hanging from the stern of the rowboat and from the sides of the wooden piles, and thus the shock was checked and no damage was done to the launch.

Summers tied her up securely, then drew the door into place and fastened it. He switched on a hand lamp and made his way over the two boats on to the path leading to the back door of the public house. Leslie waited until he was quite sure that the man would not return for anything before crawling to the stern of the launch. He found a certain amount of difficulty in pushing up the trapdoor, for the planking of the jetty was nearly a foot above his head when standing upright, and he was afraid of making a noise. However, he succeeded in letting the door over without much sound and drew himself up. He replaced the contrivance and spread the sacking over it, then made his way to the end of the

wharf and through the timber yard. Twenty minutes later he walked into the police station and was greeted with exclamations of relief by Graves and the sergeant on duty.

"Any luck ?" asked the former eagerly.

Leslie smiled and nodded.

"I've been to Armitage's retreat," he announced, "and as far as I could make out in the dark, it is an old hulk lying up a creek some distance beyond Tilbury."

He described his experiences to the two men who listened earnestly to every word. He had almost finished when Johnson walked in, and the story was repeated for the benefit of the river policeman.

"The boat passed us," observed the latter, when Leslie had concluded, "and I hailed her, but she shot by like a streak of lightning."

"Yes," returned Leslie, "I heard Armitage give orders to drive by you at full speed. We had slowed down a little before while passing a ship, and you were apparently coming up behind her."

"Well," asked Graves, "what do you propose doing now ?"

"I'll come along with Morrison and a couple of men tomorrow, and we'll join you and one of your men. Then Johnson and his assistants can take us down to the hulk and we'll make the raid."

"Why not now ?" asked Graves.

"Not on your life, my son. I'm wet, miserable, and cold. I'm going home."

"Besides," put in Johnson, "the tide'll be going out by now, and I daresay the place that you describe is nothing but mud at low tide."

"By Jove !" exclaimed Leslie; "I never thought of that. When will it be possible to get up to the hulk tomorrow — I mean today ?"

"Not before nine in the evening," returned the sergeant.

"Good Lord ! That's later than I intended making the raid. However, it can't be helped, and it will be getting dusk then. We may have more chance of approaching unobserved."

He arranged to meet the others about seven o'clock the following evening, and took his departure. It was still raining hard and he was thankful when, at last, he reached his garage. He had a

private key and was, therefore, able to use his car at any time of the night without being compelled to disturb the proprietor. He found Hawkins waiting up for him with an appetizing supper spread on the dining-room table. He had a hot bath and got into a dressing-gown before sitting down to the meal. He had suddenly discovered that he was ravenously hungry.

"One of the greatest troubles I have to contend with, Hawkins," he remarked, "is my appetite. I find it a severe handicap at times."

Hawkins was shocked.

"I can't see, sir," he protested, "how a happetite can hever be a handicap."

Leslie looked at him severely.

"I call that remark," he observed, "an attempt at spurious alliteration."

"And what may halliteration be, sir ?"

"Something distinctly unpleasant which your unholy fascination for aitches often lets you in for."

Hawkins scratched his head.

"You may be right, sir," he said doubtfully, "but what I want to know his: how can a hold harmy man hexpect to do withhout haitches hat the hage hof thirty-four."

Leslie groaned loudly and drowned his grief in his whisky and soda.

CHAPTER XXIX

ARMITAGE THROWS IN HIS HAND

Mary Fulcher watched her companion with eyes in which hope and doubt were equally blended. She and Armitage had just finished their early and meagre dinner and were sitting opposite to each other in his cabin. Ever since the day on which she had had her meals with him on account of her brother's indisposition, they had lunched and dined together, except on the rare occasions when he had taken the risk of going ashore in the daytime. Her breakfast was the only meal sent into her room, and that was mainly because he preferred to have his at a very early hour — the habit of ten years was very difficult to shake off.

Still as curt and as bitter as ever with all others, his manner had changed a great deal towards Mary. He was never brusque or harsh in his remarks to her now, and was courteous and almost gentle at times. The most reproachful comments she made to him went unrebuked and even apparently unnoticed. At first he had endeavoured lamely to justify himself to her, and lately he had shown a disposition for her presence near him which was very pleasing to the girl. By degrees a strange, unequal sort of comradeship had sprung up between them and often, when she had been sitting with Sir Fellowes Allen, he had sent for her on some plea or other, which had turned out to be nothing at all.

One morning he had noticed her bending over a bucket washing out some clothes and he had asked her why she was stooping to such menial labour.

"I didn't bring much with me," she had said, "that is why I have to do this."

He had offered there and then to do it for her and, when he had noticed the rosy blush that had mounted to her cheeks, had

promptly ordered her to pack up all her soiled linen so that he could take it to a laundry and have it done for her. It had taken all her firmness to make him give up the idea.

To his companions and Sir Fellowes Allen he was just as brutal, cold, and acrimonious as before, but if he happened to speak harshly to the judge in Mary's presence and she defended him, he would turn on his heel and walk away without a word. Sir Fellowes noticed this and, for that reason, it amused him whenever Mary took up the cudgels on his behalf. He and the girl had become very friendly and nothing had given the judge greater pleasure for years than her companionship. She had taken to reading to him and he always forgot his bundle of tarred rope as he listened to her and studied the exquisite sweetness of her fresh young face. They had long talks together mainly about Armitage, and it was entirely due to her influence that Sir Fellowes now merely regarded his captor as a man with a grievance, and not a brutal ex-convict with no belief in God or man and only a passionate and fiendish hatred of everything that was decent and lawful. The judge, in fact, had almost forgotten his own plight and often in the dark hours of night when he lay on the hard, uncomfortable deck of his unhealthy locker room, the realization came to him, with a sense of amazement, that he was very nearly enjoying his experience.

Mary had cultivated the habit of doing little things for Armitage which he accepted with a grave disclaimer of his right to allow her to do them, but she always insisted that she had nothing else to do but help where she could.

On this particular morning she had noticed a certain restlessness about him. Once or twice she had caught him gazing at her almost pleadingly, and again the old fierce look had returned to make his face sombre and hard. It was with a feeling of hope, therefore, mingled with a little demon of doubt that would obtrude, that she waited for him to tell her what was in his mind. She knew he would speak sooner or later.

Suddenly he rose from his chair and walked to the stern window where he stood gazing out for some time down the creek towards the Thames. He remained for so long in this position that she, at last, felt herself compelled to break the silence.

"Mr. Armitage," she asked softly, "is anything troubling you ?"

He swung round and looked at her.

"Quite a number of things," he admitted gravely.

"I suppose," she said, "that your escapade of last night has something to do with it. It was extremely foolish of you to take such a risk. It was so unnecessary, wasn't it ?"

"I suppose it was," he acknowledged. "As a matter of fact I was rather ashamed of it afterwards. It was the sort of thing a callow boy would have delighted in doing. Of course I had one object and that was to obtain a guarantee from the Commissioner of police that, if I gave myself up after I had completed my vengeance, he would not prosecute my companions."

"Did you actually make that offer to him ?" she asked.

He nodded. Mary gripped her hands together on her lap.

"I think that was very fine of you," she said softly. "Did — did he give you that guarantee ?"

"No," replied Armitage distinctly. "He did not !"

"I'm so glad !"

He looked at her in surprise.

"Why ?" he asked.

"Because I should hate you to make a sacrifice like that."

For a few seconds he could only stare at her in amazement.

"Sometimes," he remarked slowly, "you surprise me !"

"Do I ?" she smiled.

"Do you know," he said, his voice suddenly harsh, "I believe that that fellow Leslie is very dangerous. One or two things he said last night made me think — well, rather uncomfortable thoughts. He seemed to be so sure of himself all the time, and he was the only one there who did not show much concern at my appearance. He actually said that he would arrest me before the week is out !"

A look of dread came into her face.

"Do you — do you think he meant it ?" she gasped. "Can he possibly have discovered that you are here ?"

He shook his head.

"No," he assured her; "that is out of the question. He may be laying a trap to catch me elsewhere; perhaps it was merely bluff, but somehow I don't think it was. I believe, Miss Fulcher, that

he possesses more astuteness than I ever gave him credit for, and yet — it may cause you a certain amount of surprise — I feel no resentment against him. In fact, if circumstances had been different, he is the sort of man that I should have liked to have had as a friend."

Such a statement coming from him caused her the most profound surprise. She looked at him open-mouthed and for some seconds could think of nothing to say. Then a delightful smile spread over her countenance.

"Do you know," she confided, "you have made me very happy by that statement."

"Why ? Is he a particular friend of yours ?"

"No; but I like him," she admitted. "It isn't that, though, which has made me happy — it is the fact that you have actually shown that you still possess human emotions apart from hatred."

He walked away with an impatient exclamation, but the next moment had turned back to her again.

"Years ago," he said in a low voice, "I regarded myself as a very successful fellow; as one of those beings who are just a little more gifted than his fellows and, therefore, more deserving of the world. Of course that is an unpardonable attitude for any young man to adopt, but it must be pretty common. They generally have it knocked out of them — I had it crushed out of all recognition. I still clung to the belief that I would be successful in fulfilling the destiny I had marked out for myself. It seemed impossible to fail with my financial resources and the passionate hatred for my intended victims which filled me. To-day I am brought to the realization that I *have* failed — *that I am no longer keen to succeed !"*

Her face lit up gloriously. She rose impulsively from her chair and took one of his hands in both of her own.

"Do you really mean that ?" she asked gladly.

He nodded. After a moment he went on:

"You know what happened ten years ago ?" he said. "My honour and liberty were sworn away — I was prosecuted unmercifully and judged harshly, with the result that the shock killed my father, and I was sent to penal servitude for ten years. All that time I have nursed thoughts of vengeance. I made my plans in prison

and lived only for the time when I would be free to get the people I blamed for all my misery into my hands so that I could break them. I spent hours gloating over the tortures I would inflict upon them. I even pictured their sufferings; and the plainer I could imagine their torment, the more I was amused. I really believe that the visionary portrayal of my retribution being accomplished was the only thing that kept me sane during those years. I deliberately set myself to flout law and order, and the more I was punished, the more hatred I felt for my fellow beings. I turned my back on religion and refused to believe any longer in the Supreme Being. It was my intention, as soon as I had completed my vengeance, to spend my life and my money in doing as much harm as I could to humanity."

He paused. She was still holding his hand and he did not appear to notice it.

"When at last I was released," he continued, "I set to work at once. The men I had collected in prison to assist me came at my call, and I told them my plans. At first I was consumed by a passionate desire for haste. I had thought of this neighbourhood while a convict, and came to look round as soon as I could. As luck would have it I found this hulk. I bought the speediest motor boat I could obtain and smuggled furniture and material here. For three days I and two others worked feverishly and eagerly, with the result that we fitted up these rooms and the one forward as you see them. I took a flat in town, and moved there more as a blind than for any other reason. Sir Fellowes Allen was abducted in spite of police precautions, and I felt an unholy joy in my primary success. Then the first doubt began to assail me — something inside me seemed to be warring against my aspirations — but I shook all inclinations aside and went on with my schemes.

"It had been my intention originally to treat my five victims as convicts and, when I had them all in my power, to purchase a yacht and take them to the remotest island I could find in the South Atlantic ocean where they could just about manage to exist and where the chances were entirely against their ever being rescued. Then you came, and right at the beginning showed me clearly the man I am. You taught me that I had chosen the coward's way; that I had let my misfortunes bring out everything

that was evil in me without making the slightest fight to retain my manliness, my pride, or my humanity. You made a vivid comparison between my father and myself, and I realized then that, by my behaviour, I had betrayed him and sullied the name of my family far more than the perjury at my trial and ten years at Dartmoor had done. In short I knew myself for the spineless, unmanly worm that you called me."

"Please don't !" she pleaded with a little break in her voice.

He held up his hand to prevent her speaking, and only then did he appear to become aware that she was holding the other. He disengaged it gently and moved a little away.

"The evil in me," he asserted, "was still too strong, and I treated you badly like the bully I am. I made even greater efforts than before to complete my plans, but the doubt was stronger, more insistent, and the more I saw of you the more clamorous it became. Right up to last night I fought against it with the full strength of my evil inclinations. After leaving Grosvenor Square I went to make a further attempt to abduct my cousin — it was the third. Again I failed ! But I had weakened — it had become my intention to give myself up as soon as my vengeance was complete. I have now even abandoned the idea of further revenge. All night and most of this morning and afternoon I walked about this room fighting with myself — I hope I did not disturb you ?" She shook her head. "This is the end," he added quietly, "and it has been through your influence, Miss Fulcher. You set out, I understand, to try to efface all thoughts of retribution from my mind. You have succeeded !"

"I may have helped," she murmured softly, "but it is your better nature that has really conquered."

He shook his head, and sank into a chair.

"I owe you the greatest thing in life," he said. "Whatever happens to me I shall be grateful to you for giving me some shreds of decency even at this late hour."

Her eyes were shining brilliantly and she made an attempt to speak but her voice failed her. Suddenly she dropped on her knees by the table and hid her face in her hands. Startled, he watched her shoulders heaving with the intensity of her sobs; then he rose and made as though to lift her up, but a spasm of pain crossed

his face and he resisted the inclination. Instead he touched her gently on the shoulder. She looked at him and smiled through her tears.

"Please don't take any notice of me," she whispered. "I am crying because of the great happiness that is overflowing from my heart; and I — I want to offer up prayers of thanksgiving for you."

A look almost of reverence softened the hard lines of his face; he turned without a word and walked out of the cabin.

He went straight to the hatchway and descended the gangway to the deck below. Sir Fellowes Allen had just finished his rough supper and looked up without interest as his captor approached, but the expression on his face changed to one of surprised curiosity as the last rays of the setting sun, shining through the opening, threw up Armitage's features into bold relief. He found himself looking at the face of the man as it was when he stood before the judge ten years before. It was older of course, and somewhat lined and haggard, but there was no evil in it; the lines were soft and mild, the mouth was gentle and kindly, and the eyes were the eyes of a man who had gone through torment and found peace.

"I have come, Sir Fellowes," announced Armitage in a firm voice, "to tell you that you are free, and to express my deep regret for the suffering and humiliation I have caused you. As soon as it is dark, I will take you back to your home."

For a few seconds the judge could only stare at him speechlessly; at last he found his voice.

"But I don't think I understand," he murmured.

"If you go up to the cabin," returned Armitage, "Miss Fulcher will probably explain to you."

He turned away and ascended the gangway, then made his way to the large room forward where the five crooks were seated smoking and chatting. They looked up as he entered and on each countenance as they saw his face was depicted the same expression of curiosity that had indicated Sir Fellowes Allen's surprise.

Quickly and without any sign of emotion, he told them that he had renounced all ideas of further vengeance, and that he had decided to pay them the money he had promised them and let them depart.

"I am very sorry," he concluded, "that I have been the means of

putting you under the ban of the law, but it will be my endeavour to get that removed."

Mike Thompson guffawed loudly.

"What's the matter, guv'nor ?" he asked. "Got the wind up ?"

"No," returned Armitage in even tones. "I have come to the conclusion that my schemes of vengeance were unmanly and iniquitous. It is my intention to hand myself over to the police. Once they have me, it is likely that they will not look very seriously for you."

Fulcher and Steve Hardy sprang to their feet.

"What are you talking about ?" demanded the latter. "Why the devil should you hand yourself over to the police ?"

"Because," replied Armitage quietly, "it is now time that retribution should fall on me. I shall have to suffer for the evil I have done."

"What damned rot !" exclaimed Freeman. "If this is a joke, Mr. Armitage, I don't think much of it; if you really mean what you say, then I'm hanged if I, for one, am going to let you do a thing like that."

"Freeman is right," agreed Hardy. "We're all more or less hardened crooks here, and a stretch now and again doesn't make any difference to us. If you're bent on doing this damn fool stunt, then we'll stick by you."

"That is exactly what you will not do," asserted Armitage firmly. "I shall be taking the judge ashore and releasing him as soon as it is dark and Curly returns on the motor boat. You can come with us if you like, or make your way across the mud now, but I insist on your dispersing. It will only embarrass me and cause me endless regret if you remain with me till the end."

Hardy shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he observed, "what has caused you to alter your mind so suddenly, but I think you're a quixotic fool."

"If you will all come along to the cabin," said Armitage, ignoring Hardy's remark, "I will pay you the money I owe you."

He walked back along the deck and one by one they followed him. He found Mary and Sir Fellowes sitting together talking eagerly. They suspended their conversation as he entered and watched him go to a drawer of the desk which he unlocked. He

took out several bundles of notes of large denominations tied into neat packets, and with these returned to the door. "Frenchy" Smith took his eagerly.

"You're a damn fool, boss, but a generous one," he said and departed, announcing his intention to go ashore at once.

Mike Thompson followed his example, but Hardy and Freeman declared that they would stay with him as long as he let them. Fulcher refused to accept any money at all.

"I couldn't," he declared. "If you can do a thing like this, Armitage, so can I. You've suffered far more to cause you to go off the rails than I ever have. I only got what I deserved."

Armitage held out his hand which the other gripped firmly.

"It is your sister who has shown me what I am," said he. "Go and talk to her, Fulcher ! You ought to be the proudest fellow on earth to have a sister like that."

CHAPTER XXX

LESLIE PLAYS TRUMPS

He walked to the side of the old hulk and leaned over the bulwarks. He no longer troubled whether he was seen from the shore by a stray person or not. For half an hour he remained thus, suffering the tortures of the damned. The renunciation of Armitage was complete and he now saw himself in a worse light even than he was. Nobody but he will ever know what he went through during that period of self-abnegation. The tide was rising rapidly and the gentle lapping of the water against the hull of the old derelict acted as a sedative to the torment he was enduring.

To him came Mary. For a little while she watched him and there was a great tenderness in her eyes.

"Is it true," she asked quietly at last, "that you intend giving yourself up to the police ?"

He swung round and looked at her.

"Yes," he replied.

"Oh, but why ?" she cried. "There is no reason why you should. You can easily get away from the country and — and make a fresh start somewhere else."

"No," he said; "now that I have abandoned all thoughts of crime, I feel a great craving to wash out the evil that is in me if possible. I couldn't do that by becoming a fugitive from justice; I should never be able to raise my head again. I have decided to go through to the bitter end and suffer all that the law decides to inflict on me, even if it is to hang me. Only then can I emerge from prison, or go out feeling clean."

She caught hold of his arm and there was a look of horror in her eyes now.

"Why," she gasped, "should they — they hang you ?"

"Smithers, one of my victims," he returned calmly, "was murdered !"

She fell back against a stanchion, her face white to the lips.

"Was — was it in the papers ?" she stammered hoarsely.

He nodded.

"Yes," he replied, "but you probably never saw it as I don't think you have read the papers since you came on board. It happened the afternoon of your fourth day here. Do you remember I went ashore that morning and came back at night ?"

She inclined her head. The look of hopeless fear and misery on her face hurt him.

"I remember," she said, almost in a whisper. "I asked you if you didn't think it unwise to go on shore in the daylight, and — and you said that even Inspector Leslie would never penetrate your disguise."

"That was the day," he agreed composedly.

Suddenly a revulsion of feeling took possession of her; she grasped him almost fiercely by the lapels of his coat.

"I don't believe you did it," she cried passionately. "You couldn't — do a thing like that. Tell me that you didn't ! I want to hear you deny it !"

He sighed.

"What does it matter ?" he said wearily.

She shook him frenziedly.

"It matters everything to me," she exclaimed. "Oh, tell me; tell me !"

"I don't know," he ventured, "why you should bother your head about an absolute outsider like me. I wish to God — ! " he added with sudden vehemence, then stopped. "Since you have asked me," he went on, "I will tell you. I did *not* murder Smithers !"

"I knew it," she said gently and her hands dropped from his coat.

"But I am accused of the murder," he informed her grimly. "In fact it is reported that a note was found from me on the body of the dead man, in my handwriting and signed by me, stating that Smithers was my second victim and that the others would follow. Now, I suppose," he added, with a return of his old bit-

terness, "that you will be bound to believe I committed the murder!"

"That is unkind of you," she answered reproachfully, "I would never believe you guilty of such a terrible crime; I would never believe you capable of any *real* crime!"

"But I — " he commenced.

She interrupted him.

"I know what you were going to say," she murmured. "You were thinking of all the schemes of vengeance that you had planned, and the sufferings you had intended to inflict on your victims. But I feel sure that when it had come to the point, you would have found yourself incapable of carrying out your intentions. Besides," she continued, with true feminine inconsistency, "they deserved punishment — all except Sir Fellowes and Sir Phillip Humphreys, that is. They were only doing what they considered their duty."

"Do you really mean," he asked eagerly, "that you believe me innocent of the things I was accused of at my trial?"

"I always thought you were innocent," she declared simply.

"But you said — "

"I know what I said," she interrupted, "when you made me angry; but even then I still believed in you a little."

"Miss Fulcher," he said in a voice low with emotion, "you are — "

Again she broke in.

"First you called me 'Madam,' " she observed with a little smile, "now you call me 'Miss Fulcher.' Don't you think you might manage to say 'Mary' for a change?"

"But what right have I?" he cried in despair. "If only I had been a decent man — who could feel fit to address you on terms of equality — instead of the thing I am!"

"You are a decent man," she murmured softly. "To-day you have done the finest thing any man could do. What does it matter what temptations may have assailed you? You have now resisted them all and are yourself again. But," she added, a renewed note of fear in her voice, "how could a letter in your handwriting be found on the dead man when you did not kill him?"

"God only knows," he replied. "It is something that has puzzled me ever since. It is an absolute mystery !"

"All the more reason," she declared, "why you should not give yourself up to the police. You must go away — *you must !*"

He shook his head firmly.

"No," he said; "I am not going to play the coward now. I have made up my mind !"

They were interrupted by Sydney Fulcher, who came across the deck to them.

"Sir Fellowes Allen has changed into his pyjamas," he announced, "and I have lent him an overcoat. Can you let him have some socks ?"

The interruption seemed ludicrous and so banal that Mary and Armitage looked at each other almost with an air of astonishment. They had entirely forgotten the existence of the judge.

"It's a pity," remarked Armitage, "that we haven't a spare suit of clothes we can lend him — mine are much too large. I can let him have the socks of course." He glanced over the side. "The tide is well up," he added, "and it is getting dusk. Summers should be here in another twenty minutes if he obeys instructions." He looked at Mary. "Have you packed, Miss Fulcher ?" he asked.

Her eyes were swimming with tears and she found a difficulty in speaking. However, she managed to give him a negative reply, and he sent her to her cabin to get ready. Then, with a sigh that came from his heart, he accompanied Fulcher to the room where the judge was awaiting them.

When Mary came out of her cabin ten minutes later she found him alone. Sir Fellowes had expressed a rather morbid desire to inspect the old boat that had been his prison and had gone off under the escort of Fulcher. Armitage looked at her with admiration. Her costume had been made by an excellent tailor and, although cut in the prevailing mode, it showed off her slim, lithe figure to perfection, while the dainty, close-fitting hat, underneath which strands of her glorious brown hair peeped in fascinating fashion, acted as a delicate frame to the sweet face beneath it.

"I am ready," she announced sadly.

He nodded without speaking. Armitage realized that he was

about to lose the most precious thing life could possibly hold for him. He knew now that he loved Mary with the love that can only come to a man once in a lifetime; that his whole soul worshipped her, and that she must pass out of his ken without his even being granted the bitter sweet of declaring his adoration to her. It never occurred to him that she could possibly care for him. He was grateful to her for her sweetness, her tenderness, and her gentle tolerance. Her belief in him had touched him to the core and made him ready to face the gloom of his future with courage and fortitude. He felt he would carry her image in his mind to the last moment of his life, and that he would die with her name on his lips. But his heart ached with a dreadful yearning and he longed passionately, feverishly, to clasp her in his arms.

Neither of them could find anything to say, and she walked to the stern window and looked out with unseeing eyes at the darkening wilderness before her. Presently the tears came and ran down her cheeks unchecked; Mary was very nearly heartbroken. Through the mist of her tears she shortly became aware of a boat approaching. She turned from the window with a sob.

"Jack," she whispered unhappily, "your launch is coming !"

At the sound of the name which he had not heard for so long, and which he never had expected to hear again, he stared at her with a look of startled incredulity. Involuntarily he caught her hands in his, then shamefacedly drew away and glanced through the open port. The next moment he had stiffened and an exclamation broke from his lips.

"What's the matter ?" she cried.

"It is the police !" he answered with a curious catch in his voice. "They have discovered my hiding-place !"

He left her white and trembling and dashed out on to the deck, calling to Fulcher, Hardy, and Freeman as he ran. They appeared with startled faces from different parts of the derelict.

"Get ashore somehow — anyhow !" he cried. "The police have found us out. They'll be here in a couple of minutes."

The three men looked at each other. Hardy shrugged his shoulders.

"It's too late now," he said coolly. "We'll have to face the music."

"What about making a fight for it ?" queried Freeman in the same laconic tones.

"No !" snapped Armitage. "On no account must there be any violence. Can't you three manage to swim ashore ? You might escape in the dusk."

"Not much hope," replied Hardy. "At any rate, Mr. Armitage, we'll stop and see you through."

Armitage returned to Mary. He found her looking through the window. She turned as she heard his footsteps —

"They are coming very slowly," she said. "You can all escape before they get here."

He glanced out at the approaching boat.

"They're rowing," he remarked bitterly, "probably with the idea of taking us by surprise."

She suddenly caught hold of his arm, almost as though she were in a frenzy.

"Please ! Please !" she cried passionately. "You must escape ! For my sake ! Go ! I can't bear to think of your being in their hands again and — and — " she shuddered violently. "Oh, Jack, I want you to get away. It will break my heart if you are caught. If you don't think you can swim to the shore in time, hide somewhere on the boat, and I will tell them you're gone !"

He caught her by the shoulders and, holding her from him, devoured her face with his eyes.

"Mary," he pleaded hoarsely, using her name for the first time, "tell me why you want to do this for me ?"

She looked at him and, to his incredulous wonder, he saw reflected in her eyes all the yearning that was in his. For one long moment they gazed hungrily, longingly, into each other's souls, then she hid her burning face on his breast.

"Oh, can't you see ?" she murmured; "can't you see ?"

With a glad cry that expressed all the tumultuous joy and pride of his overburdened heart he gathered her into his arms and covered her bowed head with kisses. Presently she raised her face again and their lips met in a long, wonderful caress.

"Now go !" she said suddenly, pushing him away. "I will keep them from finding you, if I possibly can."

He shook his head and a smile transformed his face. It was the first time she had ever seen him smile.

"No, dear," he declared happily. "From this moment I commence to try and make myself worthy of you. You wouldn't have me run away now, would you ? In your heart of hearts you know that I must stay and face — things."

She nodded dumbly but a great sob burst from her pallid lips.

"Oh, Jack dear," she cried, "I love you so, and I can't bear — "

He put his arms round her again and soothed her as best he could, while she almost cried her heart out. Sydney entered as they stood thus and, for a moment, he remained by the door, awed by the scene before him. Then he approached quietly and tapped Armitage on the shoulder.

"They are nearly alongside," he murmured.

Jack nodded and led Mary gently to a chair. He bent down and their lips met passionately once more; then, with shoulders squared and a look of joy on his face, he walked out to meet his fate.

The police boat was coming round the stern of the hulk as he looked over the side and he gave orders to Fulcher to drop the rope ladder. As it clattered down the men in the boat looked up with startled expressions on their faces. Leslie stood up and grinned boyishly.

"So you saw us coming," he shouted. "What fools we must have looked rowing a motor boat. Is this a trap, or are you aware that the game is up and are inviting us to come aboard peacefully ?"

"We intend making no resistance," replied Armitage, "if that is what you mean."

Leslie was the first to ascend the ladder, followed by Morrison and the others. They stood on the deck and looked round curiously.

"So this is the end, Armitage," observed Leslie seriously.

Jack inclined his head.

"This is the end," he agreed.

A small, quaintly-dressed figure suddenly appeared and forced his way to the front. The detective recognized Sir Fellowes Allen, and saluted him.

"Glad to see you, Sir Fellowes," he greeted. "You will be glad to know that we have rescued you at last."

"Stuff and nonsense!" snapped the judge irascibly. "You haven't rescued me at all."

Leslie stared at him in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he queried.

"Exactly what I say," retorted the judge, and stalked off to the cabin.

Armitage made a cursory explanation of his renunciation and his proposed intention of liberating the judge as soon as the motor launch had arrived. Leslie shrugged his shoulders.

"You came to your senses too late," he said sternly.

Jack nodded.

"I realize that," he admitted.

The detective turned to Graves and directed him to collect everybody on board.

"Everybody on board is here," declared Armitage, "except Miss Fulcher and the judge."

Leslie looked round.

"Where are Thompson and Smith?" he asked.

"They went ashore an hour ago. I gave them all the opportunity of dispersing. Hardy, Fulcher, and Freeman preferred to remain with me to the end."

"Were you expecting us then?"

"No; but I was coming along to hand myself over to you as soon as I had taken Sir Fellowes and Miss Fulcher to their respective homes."

Leslie looked at him searchingly for a few seconds, then slowly nodded his head.

"We arrested Summers two hours ago," he stated, "so he will not be coming here to-night. We can take everybody in the police boat."

He accompanied Armitage to the cabin whither the latter went to procure his cap and coat and the money he had there. Mary and the judge were sitting in adjacent chairs, and the latter was talking earnestly to the girl as they entered.

"Good evening, Miss Fulcher," said Leslie politely. "I haven't

had an opportunity of congratulating you before on the clever way you outwitted the man I sent to watch you."

She made no reply but crossed to Armitage and stood by his side defiantly. A puzzled look, followed by another of dawning understanding, crossed the inspector's face as he looked from one to the other; then he bit his lip and it was noticeable that his eyes were full of pain. For a moment he turned away but soon swung back again with a smile which still did not hide his distress.

"Force of circumstances, Armitage," he observed quietly, "have made us enemies and, in the eyes of the world, I suppose I have won. It is obvious, however, that if you have lost, you have also gained something infinitely precious. I am not ashamed to confess that I also had hope. I think, on the whole, there is no doubt that it is I who have lost and you who have won. . . If you are ready, let's go."

He walked out of the cabin abruptly, followed by the judge. Mary and Jack were left alone for two precious seconds which they utilized as only lovers can.

"Leslie is a good fellow," murmured Jack earnestly as they reluctantly went out to the deck.

"He is a dear !" declared Mary.

Very little was said on the long run back to Limehouse. Once in the police station, Fulcher, Hardy, and Freeman were locked up in adjoining cells to that occupied by "Curly" Summers. They each had shaken hands with Armitage and wished him luck before parting from him, and Mary had taken a tearful farewell of her brother. Sir Fellowes Allen was sent home in a taxicab accompanied by Inspector Morrison. Armitage stood in the cold, draughty police station watching the disposal of his friends and the man who had been a victim of his hatred, and wondering what Leslie intended to do with him. Mary stood bravely by his side, her arm firmly clasped in his, dreading pitifully the moment of parting which was now so imminent.

Having seen the judge safely away, Dennis returned to the charge room and addressed his prisoner.

"You are going to Scotland Yard, Armitage," he announced. "Inspector Graves and a constable will escort you and hand you over to the officer in charge. I will see you in the morning."

"When shall I be brought before the magistrate ?" asked Jack.

"I'll let you know tomorrow," was the reply. "It won't be yet awhile. Well, are you ready, Graves ?"

The latter nodded and touched Armitage on his shoulder. At once Mary threw herself into her lover's arms and held on to him as though she never intended to let him go. For a moment they stood thus, and the police officers, with commendable delicacy, turned away. Presently Jack gently removed the girl's arms and walked across to Leslie.

"Take care of her, Leslie !" he pleaded hoarsely.

Dennis nodded and held out his hand which Armitage gripped eagerly.

"There's nothing for you to be worried about," said the former quietly. "You'll soon see her again."

Without a backward look and with his shoulders squared like a soldier on parade, Jack walked out of the police station to the waiting taxi. A minute or so later Leslie escorted the unhappy girl to his own car and started on the long journey to Hampstead. For a time he left her alone with her grief, feeling that he would be almost committing a sacrilege if he spoke to her. He himself was suffering from the greatest heartache he had ever known. Eventually she became calmer, and he leaned towards her and spoke earnestly for a few minutes. The result of his remarks was that Mary reached her flat and went to bed that night in a much more hopeful frame of mind than she had been in since Jack had announced his irrevocable intention of handing himself over to the police.

Back in the Limehouse police station, the sergeant on duty took a stroll along to the cells and spoke to the four men who had been Armitage's companions.

"You boys needn't be downhearted," he said cheerfully. "You'll be set free without any charge against you to-morrow morning !"

CHAPTER XXXI

A GATHERING AT SCOTLAND YARD

Sir Felix Stevenson stretched out his legs comfortably and smiled complacently at Mr. Chilsworth who stood in the centre of the large well-furnished office, wearing the thoroughly satisfied air of a man who had received exceptionally good news.

"This is a great triumph for Leslie," remarked the Commissioner. "I felt the other night that he was not boasting when he asserted that he would arrest Armitage before the end of the week. All the same I don't quite understand why he has insisted on this meeting."

"I believe," said Chilsworth, "that he has something even more sensational to tell us than how he traced Armitage. In fact he has given me one or two hints which rather point to a most startling disclosure."

"That sounds interesting," commented Sir Felix. "Were both Sir Fellowes Allen and Mrs. Pennington rescued ?"

"Sir Fellowes was," replied the assistant commissioner. "I am rather in the dark about the lady's whereabouts. It is obvious, however, that Armitage did not take her to the hulk."

There was a knock at the door and, in response to the Commissioner's invitation, Inspector Morrison entered the room.

"Inspector Leslie desires me to ask you, sir," he inquired, "whether you would object to Sir Austin Walton and Miss Fulcher being present, as well as Sir Phillip Humphreys and Sir Fellowes Allen ?"

The Commissioner frowned.

"Why on earth does he want all these people ?" he complained. "I can understand the three legal gentlemen, but what has the lady to do with the case ? Who is she ?"

"She is the sister of one of Armitage's men," replied Morrison, "and I think is by way of being rather fond of Armitage."

"Oh, well," sighed the chief, "let her come!" He looked at his watch. "It is eleven now," he added. "Is Leslie ready?"

"Yes, sir!" Morrison went out.

A minute or two later he showed in Sir Austin Walton and Sir Fellowes Allen. The Commissioner and Mr. Chilsworth shook hands warmly with both and felicitated the retired judge on his deliverance.

"I can't understand," he retorted, "why all you people will insist on congratulating me on my rescue. I was not rescued!"

The entry of Mary, accompanied by Leslie who was carrying an attaché case, precluded the puzzled question which the Commissioner was about to put to Sir Fellowes. The detective introduced the girl to the Commissioner and other gentlemen, and seats were found for all. A minute later Sir Phillip Humphreys arrived. He looked a very relieved man and walked straight up to Leslie whom he congratulated on his success. He joined in the conversation of those round him with a greater zest than he would probably have found possible the day before.

"Now that everyone is present, sir," observed Leslie, "I am going to ask your permission to have the prisoner brought in."

"I really don't think we want the prisoner here, Leslie, do we?" protested the Commissioner.

"If you please, sir!" was the firm reply.

"Oh, very well, but this seems to be rather an unusual proceeding!"

He looked round at his four visitors and wondered for what reason Leslie had arranged such a gathering. Chilsworth caught his eye and smiled broadly. A dead silence greeted the appearance of Armitage under the escort of a uniformed sergeant. He was accommodated with a chair apart from the others and the police officer stationed himself directly behind him. Leslie spoke earnestly for several seconds to Morrison who shortly afterwards went away closing the door behind him. He then turned and faced the assembled sextette who were regarding him with interest, and put the attaché case on the desk by his side.

"As you remarked, sir," he began, addressing the Commissioner,

"this is rather an unusual proceeding, but my excuse will be apparent as I go on. I asked the three legal gentlemen to be present because they were all intimately concerned with the trial for manslaughter which my prisoner underwent ten years ago, and two of them were mentioned as proposed victims of his vengeance.

"I am going to commence with a confession ! When I was put in charge of this case, I started out with the intention, not so much of bringing Armitage to justice, as to prove his innocence of the manslaughter for which he was convicted !"

His quiet announcement created a sensation. The Commissioner looked at Chilsworth with a questioning frown; Mary gripped the arms of her chair convulsively, and Armitage stared at the detective as though he had misunderstood his meaning. Leslie smiled enigmatically and went on.

"It will probably surprise you to hear such a declaration," he observed, "from the lips of a police officer, but I will explain: I have been gifted with a certain amount of instinct and, because it has never let me down, I have acquired the habit of trusting to it. When Armitage came out of prison and made such preparations to exact retribution from those whom he blamed for his misfortunes, I went to see him at his home in Buckinghamshire. It was the first time I had ever met him and I came away from his house with the conviction that he was not a man with an imagined grievance, but one who had actually suffered innocently. I made up my mind then that I would do my utmost to save him from committing the crimes he contemplated and, at the same time, search into the past in the hope of satisfying at least myself that he had been harshly treated. Unfortunately he worked rather quicker than I anticipated and disappeared — with him disappeared Sir Fellowes Allen. I was then in rather a perplexing and unenviable position. It was my duty to track him down and arrest him, but the belief in his innocence of the previous crime still remained with me. I resolved to solve both problems together and set to work with that object in view."

He went on to sketch briefly the precautions he had taken to safeguard Sir Phillip Humphreys, Stannard, and Smithers; how he had discovered where Mrs. Whitelaw (now Mrs. Pennington) lived, and his insistence on her protection. Then he described the

means he had adopted to trace the whereabouts of Armitage and detailed every movement he made with this end in view from the night he gave Benjamin Shadlow dinner in his flat until the actual arrest of Armitage on the deck of the hulk.

His audience listened to every word with deep interest; Mary, indeed, sat like an image, her eyes fixed on his face, and made no movement whatever, even when he paused for breath. Leslie then gave them their second thrill.

"Now that I have taken Armitage," he remarked calmly, "I do not believe that the police have very much against him. It is true that he abducted Sir Fellowes Allen, but even about that I understand the judge has something to say. *But Armitage did not abduct Mrs. Pennington, neither did he murder Smithers!"*

He paused to let his words sink in. There was no doubt whatever of the stir he had caused this time. In Armitage's eyes had come a look of the deepest gratitude, while Mary had, at last, made a movement. She had raised her closed hands to her mouth and was pressing them against her lips as though in a frantic effort to stifle the joy with which her heart was filled.

"In order to explain myself," continued Dennis after a while, "I must now come to the second problem that had been occupying my mind; namely, whether or not Armitage had been as guilty of the crime for which he was condemned to ten years' penal servitude, as the law had adjudged him." He looked round as though to get his hearers' attention thoroughly concentrated on him, then in a ringing, triumphant voice he launched his thunderbolt. "John Armitage," he cried, "was no more guilty of manslaughter than I am. *Dr. Whitelaw was murdered!* And he was murdered by his wife's lover, who was hiding in the alcove while Armitage was in the room, and who took advantage of the quarrel between the doctor and Armitage to rid himself of the husband and, at the same time, throw all the responsibility on to the other man's shoulders!"

It was some time before he could continue; his announcement had caused such a tremendous impression. Everybody was asking questions at once. Even the Commissioner appeared excited and repeatedly demanded to know what proofs Leslie had. Mary had thrown aside all restraint. She believed implicitly in what

the detective had said without the necessity of evidence, and was now on her knees by her lover's side babbling all sorts of incoherent things to him while he could do nothing but pat her on the head. It was Humphreys who eventually obtained silence.

"This is a very serious matter," he said impressively. "Sir Fellowes Allen was Judge in the case, and I Counsel for the Crown. If what you say is true, a terrible injustice was done to my cousin, and the whole thing should be sifted to the bottom."

"It has been," put in Sir Austin Walton. "Inspector Leslie came to me with a most amazing story a little while ago and asked me certain particulars about the case relative to questions asked and replies given by the witnesses. I presume he will tell you everything."

Leslie inclined his head. Mary returned to her chair at Armitage's prompting, looking slightly self-conscious, but with the light of a wonderful happiness in her eyes.

"On the occasion that I visited Mrs. Pennington at Hampstead," narrated Dennis, "the first thing I noticed in the drawing-room was the marble statue which had played such a big part in the trial. I don't mind admitting that that statue fascinated me — I felt that it had had a lot to do with the case but, apart from the fact that the doctor's death was presumably caused by his head striking the plinth, I could not imagine what. I asked Mrs. Pennington why she kept such an ugly reminder. She told me that she retained it because it inspired the hatred which she felt for the man who had murdered her husband, meaning, of course, Armitage. I found out that she had married a man named Pennington five years ago who, she informed me, was the British consul at Buenos Aires. Before leaving I mentioned that I would put her under police protection and she broke into a torrent of anger at the suggestion. That made me suspicious. Why should she object to detectives watching her house and her movements when they were there to save her from being abducted ? The answer was pretty obvious I think: she did not want her movements known ! As soon as I could, I took a trip to Dublin where she had been married. Sure enough a marriage had been celebrated in a registry office there between a Mrs. Whitelaw and a man named Pennington. Pennington is well-known in Dublin

and I found out his mother's address. I had a long talk with her. There was no doubt whatever that her son was the consul, but he *had never married!* I looked at the register and took a photograph of the man's signature. It bore no resemblance whatever to the signature of the real Pennington. Now obviously Mrs. Whitelaw — or Pennington — had lied when she said she had been living in Buenos Aires. I put a man on the job of finding out where she had been during those five years. He discovered that she had a house in West Drayton and that her husband lived there from time to time with her. I had no doubt that he was the lover of days gone by, but I had to prove it.

"While I was away she disappeared and everything pointed to her having been kidnapped by Armitage. But such a thing was almost impossible. She could not have been taken out of the front door, because my men were watching that, and to go out the back, her captors would have been compelled to pass through the domestic quarters, with the certainty of being seen by one of the four servants, who were down there at the time. But it would not have been a very difficult thing for her to walk down the servants' staircase herself and avoid the four servants. She knew the house and, with her knowledge, could elude any of her employees who happened to be about. If by any chance she were seen, there would be nothing unusual in the mistress of the house being there, and she could go back and try another time. No; Mrs. Whitelaw was not abducted — she simply walked out of the house of her own accord! She went to the wall dividing her grounds from Hampstead Heath, climbed on to it by means of an old oak tree that anybody could clamber up, and descended the other side by a ladder which somebody had brought with him and placed there for her. This person, no doubt, had a car waiting and took her away. At first I thought she had gone to her sister, and made a point of interviewing Mrs. Wilbur Cummings at the Ritz Hotel, but decided I was wrong. They had been unfriendly since Armitage's trial and there was no doubt that the continued rupture was quite genuine. I am convinced that Mrs. Wilbur Cummings knew something to her sister's detriment at that time, which would have made a great difference probably to the verdict. However, she refused to speak.

"As soon as I returned from Ireland, I went to Hampstead and formed the conclusions which I have just related to you. I managed to shut myself in the drawing-room and set to work to examine the statue. I felt instinctively that it could tell me a lot. I had rather a fantastic idea that the arm was worked by a hidden spring and that it had been made to descend on the doctor's head. However, that was rather ridiculous I suppose and proved to be far from the actual case. I found that by pressing hard on one of the sculptured flowers round the feet of the statue, a secret drawer in the back of the plinth opened. In that were some very interesting articles."

He bent down and opened the attaché case and took out a strange-looking implement which, at first, few recognized. Then it dawned on them that it was a small poker, of a rather elaborate kind, bent into a most grotesque shape.

"This poker," went on Leslie, "was in that drawer with something else which I will show you presently. And, gentlemen, this poker was the instrument with which the murder was committed! When Armitage went away leaving Dr. Whitelaw on the floor on that fatal day ten years ago, the murderer stepped out of the alcove to the fireplace — I went to Wimpole Street and discovered myself that he could do it in six strides there and back. He secured the poker, then creeping up to the doctor, who was probably rising to his feet at the time, dealt him one or more ferocious blows on the back of his head. Immediately after that, he dragged him to the statue and laid his head on the corner of the plinth or more likely crashed it down with force to make it more realistic, and at the same time quite certain that the doctor was dead. The butler Stannard knew that the lover was in the room. He was receiving bribes from him. How much he knew of the murder I have been unable to ascertain — he denies any knowledge of it. I went to him a few days ago and told him more or less what I knew. He refused to confess to anything, and the same night made a rather clumsy attempt to murder me. He is now in custody and has confessed to certain things, including the fact that the lover was in the room, and that he was given a large sum of money to purchase the public house which he owns at Plumstead.

"Now we come to the murder of Smithers. I discovered that for some years — ever since the trial in fact — he had been receiving an annuity from Mrs. Whitelaw's lover, because at Armitage's trial, after he had been bribed by Mrs. Whitelaw to swear that Armitage was the man with whom he had seen her, he recognized the real lover in court." Leslie paused, then in a dramatic voice continued. "It is impossible to keep that man's name out of my statement any longer! The murderer of Dr. Whitelaw, of Cedric Smithers, and the lover, now husband, of Mrs. Whitelaw, *is Phillip Humphreys!*"

There was the crash of an overturned chair, a cry of horror from Mary and of astonished dismay from the others, and Humphreys was on his feet glaring like a madman at his accuser. He strove to speak, but could only mouth in a horrible, insane fashion. Suddenly he made a terrific bound across the room towards the door. Leslie, however, was watching him and tackled him in Rugby fashion. The two of them went over with a resounding crash and, for a moment there was a fierce combat on the floor, but Chilsworth and the sergeant went to the inspector's assistance and in a moment the handcuffs were on the barrister's wrists. He still fought wildly, however, and the Commissioner had to send for a stretcher on which he was strapped and carried to the cells below.

After his removal Leslie continued his narration as though nothing had happened.

"Clutched in Smither's hand, as he lay dead," he said quietly, "I found a button which had obviously been torn off the coat cuff of the murderer while the latter was strangling him. In his pocket was a copy of a letter written on tissue paper addressed to Humphreys."

He put his hand into the attaché case, took out the piece of paper in question, and handed it to the Commissioner, who read aloud:

23rd July

Dear Sir Phillip,

I have decided to retire and your annuity would be of little use to me in the circumstances, especially as I am thinking of going abroad to get away from Armitage. No doubt you will agree

that this is a good plan as it is quite likely that if Armitage kidnaps me, as he has done Sir Fellowes Allen, he may force me to tell the truth of Mrs. W.'s lover of ten years ago.

A lump sum down will, therefore, conclude our dealings. Perhaps you will send or bring me a cheque for £5000 before tomorrow evening.

Yours faithfully
Cedric Smithers.

"That was written," said Leslie, "the day before Smithers was murdered. Humphreys undoubtedly decided that he had a splendid opportunity of ridding himself of the menace of Smithers, now that Armitage was free and had publicly threatened the fellow. He disguised himself and managed to elude my men who were watching the house. He went to Smithers' office in the Strand, and handed him a cheque for five thousand pounds. Then, when the private detective was probably looking at it, he caught hold of him in such a way that he could make no sound—for no sound was heard—and strangled him, after which he took the cheque from the dead man and, tearing it into pieces, threw it into the wastepaper basket. I found it there and had it pieced together." He took the cheque from his case and handed it round.

"About this time," he went on, "Humphreys either pretended to be, or actually was, so frightened by Armitage's threats, that we put in a man to sleep in the dressing-room connecting with his bedroom. I went to see Humphreys a few days ago and took the opportunity of handing the button, which I had found, to my man with instructions to search among Humphreys' clothes and look for the jacket from which it had been torn. He found the article in a wardrobe and there is no doubt that it is the right one. No attempt had been made to repair the rent or stitch on another button—apparently the occurrence had gone unnoticed."

"What about the communication that was found on Smithers' dead body!" put in Sir Austin. "Was that not written by Armitage?"

"No," replied Leslie. "When I called on Humphreys the other day he handed me a threatening letter which had been sent to him by Armitage. I compared it with the note left on Smithers' body

and discovered that each of the words contained in the note were also in the other communication. Humphreys had selected a piece of thin paper, placed it on top of the letter from Armitage and traced the words through which he wanted, including, of course, the signature. It was a diabolically clever piece of work.

"There is little more to tell you, Miss Fulcher and gentlemen. I have a bundle of letters here," he took them out, "which I found in the secret drawer of the plinth. They were written by Humphreys to Mrs. Whitelaw while the doctor was alive, and most of them are in connection with secret meetings. One, however, contains a statement from Humphreys that he intends spending the afternoon and evening with her while the doctor is away; it goes on to say, 'we can give Stannard the usual to keep his mouth closed.' That letter refers to the day when Dr. Whitelaw returned unexpectedly, and thus met his death.

"It was a very clever idea of Humphreys to pose as Pennington — who, by the way, he had known years ago — and marry Mrs. Whitelaw in Dublin. Although the signature in the register is in the name of Pennington the writing is Humphreys'. Mrs. Whitelaw and he had already been living together at odd times in West Drayton, I have discovered, and why they should eventually decide to marry, five years after Mrs. Whitelaw became a widow, is hard to understand. I rather suspect that she forced him into it. I found out that when she disappeared from Hampstead a few nights ago, she was taken to West Drayton, no doubt, by Humphreys, who again gave my watchers the slip that night. Morrison has gone down to West Drayton this morning to arrest her.

"There is no doubt that Humphreys was always very jealous of, and bitter against, Armitage. He knew that he would come into an immense fortune when Sir John died, and probably he was after that fortune himself. He, no doubt, hoped for a charge of murder against you, Armitage, first when Whitelaw died, and recently when you were shouldered with the murder of Smithers. After you had been hanged he would have inherited your fortune."

Leslie, who had been standing all this time, sat down. He was immediately subjected to a chorus of congratulations, and Sir

Felix Stevenson crossed the room to him and, shaking him by the hand, said certain things which made Leslie's boyish face flush with pleasure, but he experienced no particular feeling of elation. The thing he wanted most was denied him utterly and, at that moment, despite his triumph, he felt a very lonely man. Mary was watching him half-shyly, but suddenly she seemed to conquer her diffidence for she went to him. He rose to his feet with a smile.

"I shall never, never forget what you have done for Jack and me," she murmured. "You will always be my greatest and dearest friend."

And she stood on her toes and kissed him full on the lips. Dennis's loneliness departed and he felt more than rewarded for his efforts on behalf of Armitage. The latter found it very difficult to express his feelings, but the detective cut him short.

"Ask me to the wedding," he said, "and we'll cry quits !"

The Commissioner took Jack by the arm.

"Of course," he said, "everything possible will be done to recompense you for the great wrong you have suffered. I am very glad that it was my most promising officer who found out the truth. The Criminal Investigation Department, through the good work of Leslie, has proved its efficiency; but," he added with a twinkle in his eye, "you must still consider yourself under arrest for the abduction of Sir Fellowes Allen !"

"What damned nonsense !" exploded the judge. "I don't admit that he abducted me at all. At any rate, he taught me a lesson I deserved, and it's done me good. Besides, I had a chance of judging the sterling character he tried to pretend he did not possess and, above all, I met the most charming young lady I have even met in my life. Abduction be hanged !"

"Well," laughed Sir Felix, "if you don't intend to prosecute, I—"

"Prosecute ! Why, he has far more right to prosecute me ! I suppose I don't deserve an invitation to the wedding, but I'm coming whether I am invited or not !"

Sir Austin and the Commissioner both made similar statements, and a deliriously happy pair of lovers walked out of New Scotland Yard together a little later.

Jack looked at Mary with a smile which once for all erased the sorrow and grimness from his face.

"What shall we do first, dear ?" he asked.

She looked up at him, her glorious eyes full of trust and devotion.

"There is a cricket match on at Lords," she said softly. "Let's go !"

FINIS

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